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THE AGONY OF MICHAEL STEELE *Jonathan Chait* /// OBAMA'S DICK MORRIS MOMENT *Noam Scheiber*

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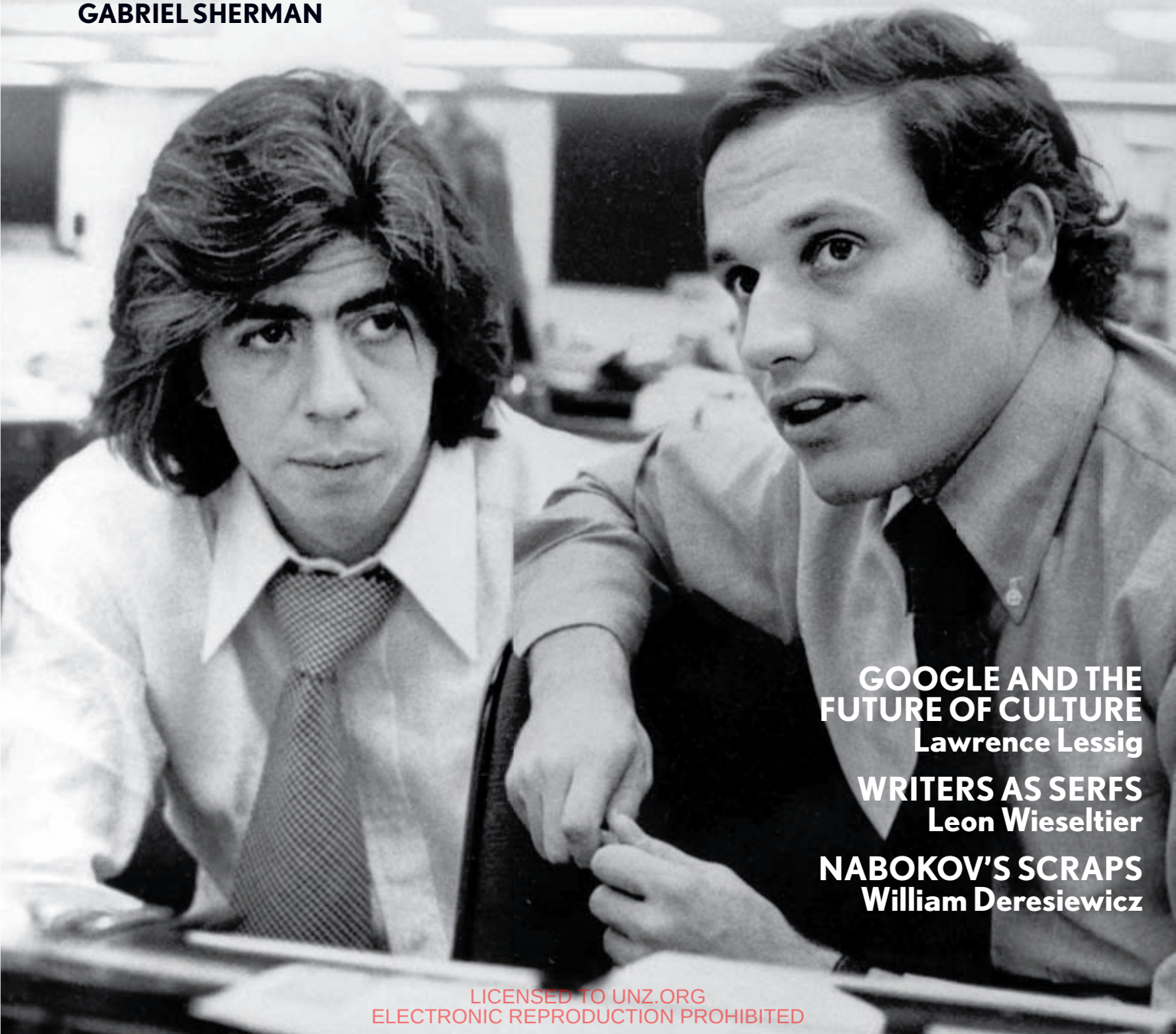
THE WASHINGTON POST IN WINTER

Inside the Messy Collapse of a Great Paper

GABRIEL SHERMAN



GOOGLE AND THE FUTURE OF CULTURE
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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Journal of Politics and the Arts

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Hot Seat

Democrats in Congress have a lot to juggle in the year ahead. If they want to avoid a slaughter at the polls, they'll need to boost job growth. Not only that, but Wall Street remains poorly regulated, and key allies are growing impatient for labor-law and immigration reform. So it's hardly a shock to hear that some Dems would prefer to set aside tackling climate change—especially so soon after a grueling health care fight. "We need to deal with the phenomena of global warming," Indiana Senator Evan Bayh recently groused, "but I think it's very difficult in the economic circumstances we have right now."

Difficult, but maybe less so than Bayh thinks. The House has already passed its own climate bill, complete with a cap on heat-trapping greenhouse gases, and, in the Senate, Democrats have begun to get some welcome support from the other side of the aisle. Susan Collins is co-sponsoring a cap-and-dividend bill, which would essentially tax carbon dioxide at the source and refund most of the proceeds to households, while a few Republicans (like Lisa Murkowski) had positive things to say about last month's Copenhagen accord, which put key developing countries on a path to curtailing their own emissions. Interestingly, one of the most forceful advocates for a Senate climate bill in recent weeks has been Republican Lindsey Graham. "All the cars and trucks and plants that have been in existence since the Industrial Revolution, spewing out carbon day-in and day-out, you'll never convince me that's a good thing for your children and the future of the planet," he told a crowd in South Carolina, the day after being censured by Charleston County's GOP for working with Democrats on the issue. "Whatever political pushback I get," he added, "I'm willing to accept, because I know what I'm trying to do makes sense to me." Lately, he's been huddling with John Kerry and Joe Lieberman on a "tripartisan" bill to reduce emissions.

Some have argued that Congress would be crazy to take on an issue as divisive as climate change in an election year, but the Senate, with only one-third of its members up for reelection, is less susceptible to that calculus than the House. And election-year timidity may be more an invention of pundits than historical fact. After all, welfare reform passed in the summer of 1996, while the most recent Clean Air Act amendments—including a cap-and-trade system for sulfur dioxide—passed the Senate in 1990. Besides, most senators realize that, if they don't act soon, the Environmental Protection Agency will start regulating carbon-dioxide emissions on its own, cutting Congress out of the process entirely.

Of course, the Senate should act to curb greenhouse gases not to avoid being trumped by the EPA, but to avert an ecological catastrophe that will affect the lives of millions. In the United States, as Bayh's hesitation shows, much of the debate around climate policy has focused on whether we can shift to cleaner forms of energy without harming the economy in any way. Green groups have taken pains to cite stat-heavy reports from the Congressional Budget Office showing that a cap-and-trade system for carbon emissions would have a minimal impact on family budgets and little effect on economic growth. But there's a large ethical aspect to climate change, too. Hundreds of millions of people in places like Bangladesh and sub-Saharan Africa are set to suffer from the storms, floods, and crop failures that a hotter planet will bring. And future generations of Americans will have to contend with unstable weather patterns, water shortages, and rising sea levels if we don't get our emissions under control.

On both scientific and political grounds, time is of the essence. Every year we put off curbing emissions is another year more carbon accumulates in the air, deepening the risks of disaster and making eventual action more difficult. A delay could also shatter the fragile progress made on global emissions over the past few months—both China and India have pledged to rein in their carbon pollution, but they could easily backslide if we do. Worst of all, Democrats are likely to lose at least a few seats in November—and with them, their chances of overcoming a GOP filibuster—so this may be their last chance for some time to set limits on greenhouse gases.

Recently, some senators have talked about breaking up the House bill and passing only the most popular portions, such as the mandate for electric utilities to buy renewable power, or loans for green technology. But those items can't substitute for a carbon-pricing regime, whether a cap or a tax, that will shift companies away from dirty energy. And splitting off the easy items now could make it more difficult to attract votes for emission limits down the road. The White House seems to recognize this and has so far committed to a major push on carbon-capping legislation in the spring. The bill that emerges won't be perfect, but its timing may never get better. ◆

Robert Neubecker

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Steele Cage

Republicans find their inner Al Sharpton.

JONATHAN CHAIT

Last weekend began with Michael Steele, chairman of the Republican National Committee, clinging to his job primarily via implicit racial blackmail. Steele's tenure has consisted of a string of gaffes and managerial blunders, but Republicans had concluded that his color made him unfireable. "You're not going to dump the first African American chairman," an influential party strategist told *Politico*, "That's the only reason."

By the end of the weekend, the attention of the political world turned to a 2008 comment by Harry Reid that Barack Obama, unlike other black candidates, could win the presidency due to his light skin and lack of "Negro dialect." Steele was immediately thrust back into the role for which his party chose him. He denounced Reid's comments as "racist" and demanded that the Senate majority leader step down.

Steele perfectly embodies modern Republican racialism. Democratic racialism represents a perversion of the civil rights ideal—an opposition to racism taken to excesses of hypersensitivity, occasionally devolving into a mere political tactic. Republican racialism is an attempt to mimic Democratic racialism without first having any grasp of the original sentiment underlying it—a parodic replica of the original thing, like a person who decides to convert to Judaism by studying Madonna.

Republican racialism is not an expression of racism but, rather, a failure to understand racism. Obama's appearance on the scene has made this misapprehension painfully apparent. On the right, there lies an enduring suspicion that Obama's race has been his greatest, and possibly only, political asset. As Glenn Beck complained in 2008, "a lot of white people will say, 'Look, I'm not racist. I voted for Barack Obama.' " Only white racial guilt could explain the inexplicable rise of this inexperienced, ultra-radical, teleprompter-dependent figure.

The reality is that Obama's race is far from an unalloyed political boon. In 22 percent of the counties in the United States, Obama garnered a lower percentage of the vote than John Kerry did in 2004, despite running in a dramatically more favorable environment. Those counties are clustered in a stretch running from Louisiana, north through Arkansas and Oklahoma, and then east through the Appalachians. Republicans, though, have treated Obama's race as a trump card.

TRB
From Washington

Thus the immediate Republican response to Obama has been to find their *own* black guy. In 2004, the Illinois GOP imported lunatic Alan Keyes from Maryland to run for Senate, on the apparent assumption that another African American could neutralize Obama's strength. In 2009, they elevated the buffoonish Steele to party chairman, where he has proven a regular source of embarrassment. (Incidentally, why are such a high proportion of black Republicans in elected life crazy? Is it because the party's demand for ideologically qualified African Americans so outstrips the supply? I'm open to alternative explanations.) The post-election Bobby Jindal wave and the current Marco Rubio wave—Mike Huckabee: "He is our Barack Obama but with substance"—represent ethnic variants of the we-need-our-own-black-guy strategy.

The campaign to whip up faux racial outrage at Reid likewise shows a party clumsily attempting to mimic what it considers a devastatingly effective tactic. Republican efforts to explain why Reid's comments amounted to racism have proven comical. "Some Americans," huffed *The Wall Street Journal*, "white and black, might be more insulted by Mr. Reid's implication that most Americans—45 years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964—are still so residually racist that they would only vote for a black candidate who isn't really … black." But, while it may be insulting to white Americans to suggest that they respond more favorably to a politician who looks and sounds more like they do, it's hardly racist, let alone false.

Meanwhile, when pressed on "This Week" to explain her accusation of racism against Reid, Liz Cheney sputtered, "Give me a break. I mean, talking about the color of the president's skin … and the candidate's," and, "It's—these are clearly racist comments, George." This is her argument in its entirety. I have omitted nothing.

By far the most common Republican indictment of Reid rests upon a simple comparison: Since Trent Lott lost his Senate majority leader post over a racial gaffe, Reid should also. "If you didn't accept Lott's apology," argues Karl Rove, "to be consistent, wouldn't [you] have to reject Reid's, as well?" Or, as Abigail Thernstrom put it, "A racial boor is a racial boor—whether on Left or Right." (Thernstrom actually maintains that Reid was far *worse* than Lott.)

The comparison says a lot about the GOP's odd misapprehensions about race. Lott, of course, got into trouble for boasting that his state had voted for Strom Thurmond's single-issue segregationist campaign for president in 1948 and that, "We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, we wouldn't have had all these problems over the years, either."

The Lott affair captures the most blinkered quality of Republican thinking on race: the failure to acknowledge the link between segregation and conservative ideology. Modern Republicans have convinced themselves that no link exists between their party and the ideology of the Old South. "Yes, some racists joined the GOP," concedes *National Review*'s Jonah Goldberg, "but with a few exceptions, they had to jettison their support for Jim Crow."

It feels ridiculous to have to point out that white Southern conservatives defected to the GOP precisely because the Democratic Party turned against Jim Crow. Strom Thurmond joined the party in 1964, and never renounced his openly racist past. Lott continued into the 1990s to build open alliances with the Council of Conservative Citizens, a successor to the White Citizens' Councils that fought integration. *National Review* opposed the Civil Rights Act and endorsed white supremacy.

These facts don't make conservatism racist or wrong. Indeed, it's a tribute of sorts to modern conservatism that it has moved so far beyond justifying white supremacy that it no longer remembers it ever did. Moreover, the GOP has admirably abandoned overt and—with very few exceptions—even covert racist appeals. It would be nice if the party hadn't proceeded from there straight into its own version of Sharptonism. But we should be grateful for small favors. ◆

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[1] Al Gore Speech at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., November 5, 2009. These quotations are based on an audio recording provided by Politics and Prose, Washington, D.C., http://politics-prose.com.

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The Mall

DeMint Condition

Becoming Senator Wingnut.

For all of Washington's political polarization, the U.S. Senate remains a clubby place. Sure, lawmakers talk smack about the unparalleled malevolence of the opposition, but there is, in general, a high degree of respect for the institution, its members, and its time-honored Way of Doing Things. While the House is known for its ideological cowboys, demagogues, and revolutionaries, the Senate is where bright lines and rough edges tend to get smoothed out in the name of statesmanship and legislative compromise.

Clearly, no one told this to Jim DeMint. During his first term, South Carolina's junior senator has made quite the name for himself. Armed with a courtly demeanor, a blandly pleasant visage, and a butter-melting drawl, he has set about flaying Democrats with a fervor that causes even some of his Republican colleagues to cringe. (His July call for the GOP to make health care Obama's "Waterloo" prompted multiple Republican lawmakers to distance themselves or flatly criticize him.) But more notable than DeMint's savaging of the opposition has been his savaging of his own people. Perched on the far-right edge of his conference—he was the only senator to speak at the September 12 tea party on Capitol Hill—DeMint has spent recent years conducting something of a party purity crusade. He has repeatedly delayed or derailed legislation supported by the bulk of his conference. He has sought new rules on how leadership and committee seats are doled out. And he has joined forces with from-the-fringe activists to turn his leadership PAC, the Senate Conservatives Fund (SCF), into a renegade funding operation that often works at cross-purposes with the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). Among the "rock-solid conservatives" SCF is championing this cycle are Marco Rubio in Florida (over the NRSC-backed Charlie Crist), Michael Williams in Texas (over presumed party favorite David Dewhurst), and Chuck DeVore in California (over establishment pick Carly Fiorina). His PAC, DeMint explains in an "About Us" video on its website, is for everyone "tired of Republicans acting like Democrats."

The irony of DeMint's revolutionary zeal is that it didn't surface until he left the rough-and-tumble House for the Senate. The genial, low-key Southerner was a well-regarded team player during his three terms representing South Carolina's fourth district (the most conservative in the state, naturally). Elected president of the 1998 Republican freshmen, the former marketing exec proved particularly useful in helping then–Conference Chairman J.C. Watts craft the party's message.

DeMint's first two years in the Senate, following his 2004 election, were largely frictionless as well. But the 2006 Democratic takeover convinced him that the GOP had lost its way. Tapped to head the Republican Steering Committee, DeMint renounced earmarks and began agitating for an overhaul of the practice—a move that did not endear him to colleagues. A major turning point, as one former GOP Hill staffer tells it, came in summer 2007, during the debate on ethics reform. The majority and minority leaders, Harry Reid and Mitch McConnell, had hammered out a bill they felt their members could live with. DeMint, however, was blocking the measure from going to conference unless Reid agreed to include his provision for earmark reform. Faced with the prospect of one rogue Republican (a freshman no less) gumming up the works, Reid thumbed his nose at the entire minority: Circumventing the conference process, he sent the bill back to House leaders to tinker with, and then return directly to him via the "ping-pong" parliamentary maneuver now being used to move health care reform. (In fact, a Senate Democratic aide credits DeMint's ethics-reform shenanigans with reviving the rarely employed tactic.) Cut out of final negotiations, Republicans lost all further input in the legislation. Many in the conference—leadership included—were furious with DeMint. As

For a time, Senator Jim DeMint didn't have any friends on the Hill.

David Cowles

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one Republican aide recalls, a handful of members felt compelled to remind the senator, "Look, the enemy is over there."

Unbowed, DeMint not only kept preaching against earmarks but also aimed to slow the legislative process in toto. By mid-2008, even Republican lawmakers were publicly grousing about his stalling of bills that enjoyed broad bipartisan support, such as President Bush's global AIDS initiative. (In one instance, DeMint irked colleagues by demanding a Friday vote on the AIDS bill, then not bothering to show up for it.) "DEMINT PANNED BY GOP," blared the headline of a July 16 piece in the Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call*, featuring criticism from Republicans Richard Burr, Olympia Snowe, and George Voinovich, as well as an anonymous colleague's slap: "He's not the minority leader, and on more than one occasion, he's acted like he is." When the 2008 elections dealt Republicans a second round of congressional losses, DeMint decided to take drastic action. He drew up a list of proposed rule changes—including term limits for leaders and members of the mighty Appropriations Committee—to be addressed at a closed-door conference meeting. As the former Hill staffer recalls it, at the last minute, DeMint realized the riskiness of his plan and asked that his proposal not be presented. But the leadership, fed-up with DeMint's rabble-rousing, brushed aside his request, leaving the senator to squirm as his slate of rules was shot down.

Afterward, DeMint fell into a funk. "There was a period of time after that where he was pretty depressed and eating lunch a lot by himself and didn't really have any friends in the Capitol," recalls the former staffer. But soon, DeMint and his people began casting about for like-minded conservatives he could bond with. Traveling around the country communing with the grassroots and hawking his book *Saving Freedom*, DeMint once more found comfort, acceptance—and opportunity. "It really opened up some doors for him and sort of showed him this was something to pursue and push," says former DeMint speechwriter Mike Connolly. Realizing he "was never going to be part of the club," recalls Connolly, the senator had to make a choice. "He looks at himself and looks at the party and asks, 'What can I do? Am I just here to be the right flank and try to influence a few little amendments here and there, or am I really going to try and change'" the conference? Thus was cemented DeMint's role: perpetual burr in the butt of his party's leadership.

In many ways, of course, DeMint is of great service to Republican leaders, especially during bare-knuckle brawls like the one over health care. Still, by aggressively backing conservatives against the establishment choices in some of the biggest midterm races, DeMint has raised the stakes for himself and his conservative brethren. If folks like DeVore and Rubio triumph come fall, DeMint's stock will soar, and movement conservatives will gain major leverage in the ongoing struggle for the GOP's soul. If, however, DeMint's horses fail to perform, the equation flips. The elements of the party who have been warning against a shrinking tent are likely to ratchet up efforts to shove "rock-solid conservatives" into the shadows. And DeMint could once again find himself eating lunch alone.

MICHELLE COTTLE

Small Ball

Obama's Dick Morris moment.

IN EARLY DECEMBER, the White House announced four finalists for the president's Securing Americans Value and Efficiency (SAVE) Award—a competition that plumbed the depths of the federal bureaucracy for ideas on how the government could save money. One finalist proposed streamlining the way the Forest Service forwards campground fees to the government. Another suggested that the Social Security Administration allow people to book appointments online rather than only by phone. The eventual winner—subsequently flown to Washington, Super Bowl–champ style, for a meeting with the president—was a V.A. hospital worker who wanted to let discharged patients take medicine home with them rather than throw it away.

On one level, the competition was shrewd. It nicely illustrated the White House mantra, critical in a time of unprecedented bailouts, that every single dollar of spending deserves scrutiny. It also highlighted the administration's openness to grassroots input, something the White House is at pains to show amid Washington's recent accumulation of power. (Certainly, it was lost on no one that the four finalists hailed from places like Birmingham, Alabama, and Grand Junction, Colorado.)

On another level, though, the SAVE competition could be read as an admission of futility by a president who campaigned on doing big things while repudiating the "broken politics" of the past. This year's deficit will be well over $1 trillion, alongside which a few million dollars in potential savings doesn't even amount to a rounding error. It's hard to believe the White House would worry about such trivialities if it could make an actual dent in the budget shortfall. Which raises a question: After a year of barely restrained governing ambition, has the political system suddenly forced the president into a posture of symbolically resonant tinkering? Has Obamaism descended into—gasp!—Clintonism?

SUCH SMALL-BORE-ISM dates back decades in politics, of course. (What is the culture war if not a series of substantively marginal but emotionally charged skirmishes?) But, at least on the Democratic side of the ledger, its strongest association is with the Clinton administration following the party's 1994 landslide defeat. Unable to set the congressional agenda, and determined to show voters he wasn't the wild-eyed liberal they'd taken him for after gays in the military and health care, Clinton dedicated himself to a series of modest initiatives, like V-chips and school uniforms, in the run-up to his 1996 reelection. The theory, touted by advisers like Dick Morris and Mark Penn, was that the micro-initiatives would send powerful messages about Clinton's values and priorities, however limited their practical impact. "It's the McDonald's theory," says pollster Stan Greenberg, an early Clinton adviser. "If the hedges are neatly trimmed," people are inclined to trust what's inside.

For all the eye-rolling it inspired, the reliance on the small-bore outlived Clinton's presidency. In 2007, for example, congressional Democrats scored a powerful p.r. victory when a vote to expand children's health care elicited a Grinch-like veto from George W. Bush. The one constant through all these episodes has been White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel—a former Clinton White House adviser turned House Democratic leader. "Rahm thinks that stuff works," says Maryland Representative Chris Van Hollen, who succeeded Emanuel as head of the House Democrats' campaign committee. But, Van Hollen hastens to add, "it's not to the exclusion of larger things—that's pretty clear from the agenda they embarked on."

Indeed, if you connect the publicly available data points, the apparent White House strategy was to pass a series of major initiatives in its first year to 14 months—health care, Wall Street (or "regulatory") reform, cap-and-trade—then scale back and sell these accomplishments. (Recall that the president's initial deadline for health care votes in

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the House and Senate was the August recess.) The question, now that Congress has blown through the hoped-for timetables, is whether to press ahead full speed or to start scaling back anyway.

On Capitol Hill, it's not much of a question at all. One senior Democratic Senate aide says the chamber plans to wrap up its major business within a few months, partly to focus on refining its message for voters. "The reality is that we'll be trending somewhere toward that into the spring and summer," says the aide. The logic isn't hard to comprehend: Legislating is an inherently messy exercise. None of the compromises and side-deals necessary to grease a measure along seems particularly ennobling in real-time. "It's hard for people to look at the legislative process and say there are good guys and bad guys," says Greenberg. So long as the details are being hammered out, "it mostly looks like gridlock, special interests, and politics as usual." Greenberg allows that this even holds for a bill like regulatory reform, which could ultimately prove helpful politically.

According to the Senate aide, the first four weeks of the chamber's legislative year—which begins on January 19—will be devoted to three initiatives: finishing up health care, hashing out a job-creation bill, and raising the government's debt limit, the last of which is like the colonoscopy of Senate votes (necessary and not *that* time-consuming in the grand scheme of things, but seemingly interminable while it's happening). Which means the earliest the Senate could start working on regulatory reform, the next major item in the queue, would be late winter. Unfortunately, the process of finalizing that bill could take months. That leaves cap-and-trade on its deathbed—"I can't rule it out, but it's fair to say it's losing steam," says the Senate aide—to say nothing of other initiatives like K–12 education.

Instead, Democrats will likely spend the second half of the year reaching for issues that send important messages to voters. Van Hollen has had conversations with the White House about a bill called the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act, which would bolster protections for federal workers who expose fraud, waste, and abuse. "It's part of a narrative focused on accountability and transparency," he says. Likewise, many in the party are increasingly worried about a lack of enthusiasm from the base—particularly labor, which lost out on the public option and may see its health benefits taxed for the first time. To combat this, the party could pick a series of fights with business over issues like mine safety, or over its appointees and judicial nominees. In recent days, the White House has even floated a roughly $100 billion fee on banks to recoup bailout money, something likely to be popular across the political spectrum. "If you only focus on the big ideas, they don't happen very often. You need the smaller stuff to put points on the board in between big victories," says Erik Smith, a Democratic media consultant.

Ironically, the one hitch in all this is the White House itself, which, despite Rahm's instincts, might not be ready to shift completely into small-bore mode. As eager as Obama's aides are to craft their campaign narrative, they're also painfully aware that, thanks to near-unified Republican opposition, passing any faintly controversial measure requires 60 votes in the Senate. And, the way things are looking politically, Democrats will almost certainly lose their 60-vote majority this year. "Mitch McConnell is going to pick up two to five, maybe six senators. You cannot work with him. You will essentially pass nothing," says one veteran Democratic consultant. "I don't think you have any choice but to go full steam ahead."

The result is that the White House and congressional Democrats are operating with somewhat different end-dates in mind: 2010 for Congress; 2012 for the White House. Take, for instance, immigration reform, which the White House hasn't yet abandoned. Congressional Democrats, fearful of inflaming Tea Party sentiment this November, want nothing to do with the idea. But the White House political operation believes it would be an important gesture for Hispanic voters, a key constituency for Obama's reelection campaign.

And then there's cap-and-trade. For all the angst it evokes in the Senate, the White House still shows little sign of backing off. One operative who follows the issue closely notes that, if the White House had been planning to fold on climate change, it would have been strange to send the president to Copenhagen last month for negotiations on an international treaty. "He has skin in the game now," says this person. On top of which, the House has already passed a version of the bill, and nothing riles vulnerable members more reliably than sticking their necks out in vain. "I don't know on any given day of week whether it's a fight Rahm wants," says the operative. "But you can bet Nancy Pelosi reminds him of the tough votes [her caucus has] taken."

The likely solution, according to congressional hands, is to split off the most popular pieces of the outstanding legislation and pass them individually—which is to say, embrace a form of incrementalism. For example, there is considerable support on the Hill for New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman's so-called "green bank" proposal, which would use government money to help fund clean-energy investments, and for requirements that utility companies generate a certain amount of renewable energy within a decade or so. If the legislative schedule stays on its current trajectory, expect to see Democrats pass these scaled-down measures as a kind of "down payment" on energy—a phrase administration officials have used themselves.

The downside of this strategy is that it could make finishing the job more difficult. "The case against just rushing through the popular part is that it's that much harder to pass the whole thing later because you've removed one of the sweeteners," says pollster Guy Molyneux. "You may never get back to the rest of the reform." At least not until the next Democratic phenom bounds into the White House with supermajorities in Congress.

Noam Scheiber

Jonathan Chait has a blog.

(STUDIDITY BEWARE.)

tnr.com/blogs/jonathan-chait

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Nude Awakening

The dangerous naked machines.

Last summer, I watched a fellow passenger at Washington's Reagan National Airport as he was selected to go through a newly installed full-body scanner. These machines—there are now 40 of them spread across 19 U.S. airports—permit officials from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to peer through a passenger's clothing in search of explosives and weapons. On the instructions of a security officer, the passenger stepped into the machine and held his arms out in a position of surrender, as invisible millimeter waves surrounded his body. Although he probably didn't know it, TSA officials in a separate room were staring at a graphic, anatomically correct image of his naked body. When I asked the TSA screener whether the passenger's face was blurred, he replied that he couldn't say. But, as I turned to catch my flight, the official blurted, "Someone ought to do something about those machines—it's like we don't have any privacy in this country anymore!"

The officer's indignation was as rare as it was unexpected. In the wake of the failed Christmas bombing of Northwest Flight 253, the public has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic about these scanners. A recent *USA Today* poll found that 78 percent of respondents approved of their use at airports. Western democracies have been no less effusive. President Obama has ordered the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to install $1 billion in airport screening equipment, and the TSA hopes to include an additional 300 millimeter-wave scanners. Britain, France, Italy, and the Netherlands have all made similar pledges to expand their use.

The Bush administration worried about explosives planted in prosthetic genitalia.

Let's not mince words about these machines. They are a virtual strip search—and an outrage. Body scanners are a form of what security expert Bruce Schneier has called "security theater." That is, they give people the illusion of safety without actually making us safer. A British MP who evaluated the body scanners in a former capacity, as a director at a leading defense technology company, said that they wouldn't have stopped the trouser bomber aboard the Northwest flight. Despite over-hyped claims to the contrary, they simply can't detect low-density materials hidden under clothing, such as liquid, powder, or thin plastics. In other words, the sacrifice these machines require of our privacy is utterly pointless. And, as it happens, it's possible to design and use the body scanners in a way that protects privacy without diminishing security—but the U.S. government has failed to do so.

Millimeter-wave scanners came on the market after September 11 as a way of detecting high-density contraband, such as ceramics or wax, that would be missed by metal detectors when concealed under clothing—while avoiding radiation that could harm humans. The machines also reveal the naked human body far more graphically than a conventional x-ray. But, from the beginning, researchers who developed the millimeter machines at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory offered an alternative design more sensitive to privacy. They proposed to project any concealed contraband onto a neutral, sexless mannequin while scrambling images of the passenger's naked body into a nondescript blob. But the Bush administration chose the naked machine rather than the blob machine: Some blob skeptics argue that blotting out private parts would make it harder to detect explosives concealed, for example, in prosthetic genitalia. Of course, neither the blob nor the naked machine would have detected the suicide bombers who have proved perfectly willing to

Jude Buffum

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conceal explosives in real body cavities, as a Saudi suicide bomber proved in a failed attempt to assassinate a Saudi prince using explosives planted in a place where the sun doesn't shine.

Former DHS director Michael Chertoff, whose consulting firm now represents the leading vendor of the millimeter machines, Rapiscan, has been a vocal cheerleader for body scanning: He called the Christmas bombing a "very vivid lesson in the value of that machinery." In 2005, under Chertoff's leadership, TSA ordered five scanners from Rapiscan, claiming that its naked images were less graphic than those of competitors. TSA also introduced one additional privacy protection: Agents who review the images of the naked bodies are in a separate room and, therefore, can't see the passengers as they're being scanned. According to the TSA website, the technology blurs all facial features, and, based on some news accounts, private parts have been blurred as well. But because the TSA remains free of independent oversight, it's impossible to tell precisely how they're being used.

Most troubling of all, the TSA website claims that "the machines have zero storage capability" and that "the system has no way to save, transmit or print the image." But documents recently obtained by the Electronic Privacy Information Center reveal that, in 2008, the TSA told vendors that the machines it purchases must have the ability to send or store images when in "test" mode. (The TSA told CNN that the test mode can't be enabled at airports.) Because no regulations prohibit the TSA from storing images, the House (but not the

DEATH OF A POET

Rachel Wetzsteon, 1967–2009

Dark times can always get darker. We begin the year at this magazine in a long shadow of sadness. Rachel Wetzsteon, our new poetry editor, took her life at the end of December. She was forty-two. She left a thoughtful and compassionate letter in which she described the magnitude of her despair. She also expressed her gratitude to this magazine for the honor of her appointment. The honor, of course, was ours. Rachel was a genuinely remarkable poet. She believed in form, but was not exactly a formalist; she believed in emotion, but was not exactly an emotionalist. Instead, she made sense of her experience, and discovered beauty in it, by submitting it to the play, and the rigor, of rhythms and rhymes. She was certainly one of the great writers about life in contemporary Manhattan: She made the Upper West Side into a poetical place, which is of course a considerable achievement. More powerfully, she transformed a single woman's existence in New York into literature—wry, bruised, reflective, lyrical, and delicately observed literature. Her looking-for-love poems are wiser about love than many love poems. She knew how to be tenebrous and whimsical at the same time. Her verse chronicles her struggles with her demons, and their regular defeat by her talent for truth and pleasure. In the end, however, they were not defeated.

Rachel threw herself into her work as our poetry editor; her mother says that it was one of the last stays against her doom. In her brief association with us, she chose more than six months' worth of poetry for our pages. We will publish all her selections, though it would be morbid, and too painful, to keep her name on our masthead. Her editorial decisions will keep her memory alive for us in the seasons to come.

It is our policy not to publish poems by our poetry editor; but now, alas, we are no longer constrained from putting Rachel's work before you. Gratefully, and with undimmed admiration, we offer two poems from *Sakura Park*, the strong and elegant collection that she published in 2006. *Leon Wieseltier*

Short Ode to Morningside Heights

Convergence of worlds, old stomping ground,
comfort me in my dark apartment
when my latest complaint shrinks my focus
to a point so small it's hugely present
but barely there, and I fill the air
with all the spiteful words I spared the streets.

The pastry shop's abuzz
with crazy George and filthy graffiti,
but the peacocks are strutting across the way
and the sumptuous cathedral gives
the open-air banter a reason to deepen:
build structures inside the mind, it tells
the languorous talkers, to rival the ones outside!

Things are and are not solid.
As Opera Night starts at Caffé Taci,
shapes hurry home with little red bags,
but do they watch the movies they hold
or do they forego movies for rooftops
where they catch Low's floating dome in the act
of always being about to fly away?

Ranters, racers, help me remember
that the moon-faced fountain's the work of many hands,
that people linger at Toast long after we've left.
And as two parks frame the neighborhood—
green framing gray and space calming clamor—
be for me, well-worn streets, a context
I can't help carrying home, a night fugue
streaming over my one-note *how, when, why*.
Be the rain for my barren indoor cry.

A Turn for the Better

Strangely stable today, and a rain-slicked street
that once pierced me with its sorrow has turned
limpid and various as a view of Delft.
And the song I murmured yesterday—

Oh heart that aches
and trust that breaks,
for your poor sakes
may all the charming flakes
and no-good rakes
be burned at spiked, enormous stakes

has just revealed another verse—

The road is wide, is ravishing.
Until I walk on solid ground
no one is allowed to sweep me off it.

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Senate) voted last year to ban the use of body scanning machines for primary screening and to prohibit images from being stored.

As long as the TSA fails to blur images of both faces and private parts, the machines will represent a serious threat to the dignity of some travelers from the 14 countries whose citizens will now be required to go through them (or face intrusive pat-downs) before entering the United States. Some interpretations of Islamic law, for example, forbid men from gazing at Muslim women unless they are veiled. It's also unfortunate that, a year after the Supreme Court declared, 8-1, that strip searches in schools are unreasonable without some suspicion of danger or wrongdoing, virtual strip searches will soon be routine for many randomly selected travelers at airports, rather than reserved for secondary screening of suspicious individuals.

But the greatest privacy concern is that the images may later leak. As soon as a celebrity walks through a naked machine, some creep will want to save the picture and send it to the tabloids. And the danger that rogue officials may troll the database is hardly hypothetical. President Obama's embattled nominee to head the TSA, Erroll Southers, conducted two searches of the confidential criminal records of his estranged wife's boyfriend, downloaded the records, and passed them on to law enforcement, possibly in violation of the Privacy Act, and then gave a misleading account of the incident to Congress. That's why the images should be anonymous and ephemeral, so agents can't save the pictures or connect them to names.

Even if the body scanners protected privacy, Schneier insists, they still would be a waste of money: The next plot rarely looks like the last one. But, if we need to waste money on feel-good technologies that don't make us safer, let's at least make sure that they don't unnecessarily reveal us naked. President Obama says that he wants to "aggressively pursue enhanced screening technology … consistent with privacy rights and civil liberties." With a few simple technological and legal fixes, he can do precisely that. Blob machine or naked machine—the choice is his.

Jeffrey Rosen

Straight Talk

What Harry Reid gets about Black English.

To rake Harry Reid over the coals about his "no Negro dialect" comment will bring to mind the Biblical passage about trying to take a speck out of someone's eye when you've got a log in your own. Pretty much all of America, black and white, feels exactly the way Harry Reid does about the way black people talk—and they aren't even worried about saying it out loud.

First of all, we need not pretend that, by "Negro dialect," Reid meant the cartoon minstrel talk of "Amos 'n' Andy." After all, why would Reid, a rational human being under any analysis, be under the impression that any black person talks like Uncle Remus, much less be surprised that one of them does not? My guess is that he said "Negro" in a passing attempt to name Black English in a detached, professional way, randomly choosing a slightly arcane and outdated term—"Negro English" was what scholars called Black English until the early 1970s. Reid likely caught wind of that terminology—he's been around a while, after all.

Second: Yes, there is such a thing as Black English. Sometimes one hears a claim that Black English is the same as white Southern English. We must always beware of stereotyping and be open to the counterintuitive, but here is an instance where we can trust our senses: There is a "Black sound." It's not just youth slang; it's sentence patterns—*Why you ain't call me?* (not a white Southernism, notice)—and a "sound," such that you'd know Morgan Freeman was black even if he were reading the phone book. The combination is what we all feel—with uncanny accuracy even without seeing faces, as linguists have found—as "sounding black." Of course, not all blacks speak Black English or have The Sound, and those that do (which is most) do to varying extents. But they do. That's what Reid meant—we all know it, and it's OK to know it.

Third: Reid's comment suggests that he associates Black English with lack of polish and low intelligence. But, before we burn him in effigy for it, or ask, "What's *that* all about?" as if we don't know, let's admit that most Americans feel like Reid does. He wasn't being a benighted "racist" holdout; he was speaking as an ordinary American. We have caught him in nothing we don't, most of us, feel ourselves.

It's a love-hate relationship we have with black speech. On the one hand, we associate it with emotional honesty, vernacular warmth, and sex—Marvin Gaye would not have had a hit with "Why Don't We Venture to Consummate Our Relationship?" or even "Let's Have Sex," instead of "Let's Get It On." Yet it's not a dialect—a sound—that we associate with explaining Greek verbs or cosines or engaging in complex reasoning. Black English sounds cool, and even hot, and maybe "sharp"—but note that sharp is what you call someone whom you wouldn't necessarily *expect* to be smart … and whom you don't actually think is all *that* smart.

That's a shame, because Black English is as systematic as standard English, and what we hear as "mistakes" are just variations, not denigrations. Try telling a French person that double negatives are "illogical"—South Central's *I ain't seen nobody* is Lyon's *Je n'ai vu personne.* The "unconjugated" *be* in a sentence like *Folks be tryin' it out* is used in a very particular way, to indicate habits rather than current events, making explicit something that standard English leaves to context.

But, in the real world, it's very hard to hear it that way. You can get a sense of it with linguistic training, or curling up with *Spoken Soul,* by Stanford's John Rickford, and *African American English,* by University of Massachusetts Amherst's Lisa Green, but, otherwise, Black English will always sound to most people like mistakes, in all of its warmth. We also feel this way about Southern "hick" grammar—race is not the only factor here. In both cases, we spontaneously demote a dialect born in illiteracy. It's a weird intersection: Unlettered speech is not "broken." The most "primitive" societies' languages are the ones that are the most complicated; often, the backwater dialects of a language are harder than the standard. Out in the sticks in Bulgaria, there are often three ways to say *the* instead of one.

Of course, that's all very nice, but real life is that Harry Reid hears black speech as lowly. Yet so do black people, as often as not. In 1996 and 1997, during the Oakland controversy over whether Black English should be used in classrooms as a transition to standard English, black people were laughing as loud as anyone at the idea that "Ebonics" is "a language." Or, over the transom recently, I got a copy of a presentation that James Meredith, who was the first black per-

ANTHONY RUSSO

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son admitted to the University of Mississippi and caught hell for it physically and emotionally, has given to young black audiences. In his introduction, Meredith spells it out:

> Most people in this room use a lot of Black English and a little Proper English.
>
> Anyone who wants to become an intellectual giant must learn and use a lot of Proper English and as little Black English as possible.
>
> I am not going to argue with anyone about the matter. You can do what you want to do.
>
> However, I will tell you that anyone who continues to use a lot of Black English will never become an intellectual giant.

So Meredith would surely hear it as a plus that Obama has no trace of what a man of his years likely has been known to call, in all seriousness, Negro dialect.

Fourth: Reid's feelings about Black English are likely couched in a thoroughly compassionate position. Here's a guess, based on what I have heard countless people of all colors say: "Black people use bad grammar so much because they were brought here as slaves and denied education. The bad grammar holds on today because too many blacks still have bad schooling, and they pass it down the generations. They would be best off if society allowed them the education and opportunities to get rid of their bad grammar. It's not their fault."

There are all kinds of things that are off here, if we are inclined to go pointy-headed. Humans can be bidialectal as well as bilingual and, therefore, can speak both standard and Black English—as Obama does, and as Reid acknowledged. Plus, the dialect is now felt by blacks as a cultural hallmark, amid a loving ambivalence about its "ungrammaticality." And so on—but most of this is for seminars. Back to, as always, real life. I know so very many black people who would agree with the above hypothetical quotation from Reid—many of them deeply dedicated in assorted ways to black uplift. Are they immoral? Do they hate their own people? No—upon which we can give Harry Reid a break.

Fifth: We have to really listen to what Reid said instead of getting carried away over the tangy, backward flavor of the one word "Negro." In mentioning that Obama doesn't speak in "dialect," Reid acknowledged something many blacks are hot and quick to point out: Not all black people use Black English. OK, they don't—and Reid knows. He didn't seem surprised that Obama can sound not black when he talks—he was just pointing out that Obama is part of the subset of blacks who can. He knows there is such a subset. Lesson learned.

Indeed, Reid implied that black dialect is less prestigious than standard, such that not speaking it made Obama more likely to become president. That is, he implied what we all think, too: Black English is, to the typical American ear, warm, honest—and mistaken. If that's wrong, OK—but since when are most Americans, including black ones, at all shy about dissing Black English? And who among us—including black people—thinks that someone with what I call a "black-cent," who occasionally pops up with double negatives and things like *aks,* could be elected president, whether it's fair or not? Reid, again, deserves no censure for what he said unless we're ready to censure ourselves, too.

Inevitably, there will be reminiscences of Joe Biden's comment about Obama being "articulate." I'm less politic on that term, as applied to black people who have no reason not to be articulate. A recent favorite: Someone writing me a letter about one of my Teaching Company lectures on linguistics praised me for "enjoying yourself up there so confidently speaking standard English"—as if I have to take a deep breath and "wield" standard English and feel like I'm a pretty special fella for being able to, with my "native" ghetto inflections and expressions turning up in my speech when I'm tired.

But this isn't the same thing. Reid implied that Black English is lesser than standard English and that it's therefore good that Obama can speak without sounding black. This is not about whether black people have to sweat to speak standard English; it's about whether Black English is as good as standard English. Most of America, *black as well as white,* is at the exact same point in understanding vernacular speech and its proper evaluation as Reid is.

For which reason most of America should leave him alone about this and move on.

John McWhorter

✳ *Where politics, race, and culture collide: John McWhorter's blog at www.tnr.com*

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Turf Warrior

Can Dennis Blair save U.S. intelligence?

JAMES KIRCHICK

In the shadow of the intelligence failure that culminated with Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab lighting an explosive aboard a Detroit-bound flight, the titular head of the U.S. intelligence community was busy fighting another war. For months, in fact, Admiral Dennis C. Blair, the director of national intelligence (DNI), had been waging an epic bureaucratic offensive. His job had been created in the wake of September 11 to foster cooperation and accountability among the 16 agencies sifting through the mounds of inbound data about threats to U.S. interests. Turf wars, the job's congressional creators theorized, had prevented spooks from the sort of sharing that would piece together plots. So a strong leader was needed to heal these rifts in the government.

Under Blair, however, these rifts have grown worse. His sworn bureaucratic foe is CIA chief Leon Panetta, who, at least on paper, reports to him. But, when Congress sculpted Blair's job, it left plenty of ambiguity about the extent of the DNI's authority over the CIA, which seemed bound to create the very squabbling that the reforms were intended to stifle. Blair has compounded this problem with his knack for stirring intramural controversy. He seems to relish the occasions when he can snatch power from Panetta. Over the course of the past year, he has demanded the right to appoint the top American spy stationed in each foreign country, a power traditionally reserved for the CIA director. He has hammered the agency for botching the Afghanistan war and attempted to assert more control over covert operations, from paramilitary units to drone strikes in Pakistan. (Blair declined requests for an interview.)

All in all, relations between the DNI and CIA have never been worse. Last summer, a source close to Blair fumed about Panetta's "insubordination" to *The Washington Post*'s David Ignatius. The White House eventually dispatched National Security Advisor Jim Jones as a special envoy to negotiate a truce between the men. When Jones failed to make peace, Vice President Joe Biden took a turn at brokering a cease-fire. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Jones ultimately crafted a formal agreement that clarified the relationship. Among other things, it preserved the CIA's direct line of communication to the White House and the privileged role of CIA station chiefs. Even though Panetta signed the document, Blair refused to give his consent. His huffing finally forced Jones to unilaterally issue a memo last month imposing a clearer division of labor.

Blair's obstreperousness doesn't shock those who have worked with him in the past. As one former Pentagon official told me, he "doesn't suffer fools gladly and his definition of fools is fairly expansive. Sometimes that can [mean everyone] up to and including the secretary of defense and even presidents."

The fact that relations between the most powerful members of the intelligence community are fraught is not a comforting thought at the present moment. Following the foiled Christmas plot, President Obama has waxed outraged over the bureaucracy's failure to "connect the dots." Blair's job description has always made him responsible for ensuring the efficacy of a system that flows intelligence to appropriate analysts with a minimum of bureaucratic friction. With so much so obviously broken in this system, the question is, does he have the temperament and organizational chops to get the job done?

That Dennis Blair would ascend to the highest ranks of government surprises almost no one who encountered him on his rise there. Even those who don't like Blair concede his smarts—and those who admire him tend to gush. Richard Danzig, who served as secretary of the Navy in the Clinton administration, told me that Blair exudes "seasoned maturity" and "obvious kinds of stature." He's the "smartest-in-the-class–type person," says Hudson Institute defense analyst Richard Weitz. Hailing from New England Yankee stock and Naval aristocracy, Blair is the sixth generation of his family to serve as an officer. After graduating second in his class from Annapolis in 1968—a year that also included the notorious Oliver North, Senator Jim Webb, and current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen—Blair scored a Rhodes Scholarship. Next came a White House fellowship, followed by a string of top intelligence jobs, including a stint on the National Security Council (NSC) staff in the Reagan administration. "He went everywhere with a pad, constantly writing notes," says one former NSC staffer who served with Blair. "I thought to myself, 'This guy's writing a book.'"

While he obviously impressed his superiors, Blair's headstrong tendencies could also make him a nuisance. In 1999, he assumed control over the United States Pacific Command (PACOM), which controls all U.S. military operations in the Pacific theater. Forty-three countries were under his purview, along with 300,000 military personnel. It was a vast assignment that placed him in proximity to many impending crises. The first of these to strike on his watch came in Indonesia, where government-backed militias waged a violent campaign against an independence movement on the island of East Timor.

Two months after assuming his command, Blair met with General Wiranto, the leader of the Indonesian military, with instructions from Washington to warn him that, unless he stopped supporting the militias, the United States would cut off all contacts. Yet, as *Washington Post* reporter Dana Priest recounts in her book, *The Mission*, Blair never issued that warning. Instead, he invited Wiranto to a military seminar in Honolulu, where he promised to train Indonesian soldiers in crowd control. And he told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the Indonesian military was playing "a difficult but generally positive role."

What did this positive role entail? The Indonesians were supporting militias responsible for killing not only large numbers of East Timorese—perhaps as many as 7,000—but also 16 United Nations election observers. The militias forced 20,000 independence supporters into prison camps, where they were kept with hardly any food. But such humanitarian concerns were secondary. Blair considered maintaining strong ties with the Indonesian military to be far more important.

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When the Clinton administration threatened to expel the handful of Indonesian military officers studying in the United States, Blair successfully urged the NSC to reverse this decision. "At no point," Priest writes, "did Blair ask the special operations officials who worked most closely with Indonesia to reach out to contacts they had developed . . . to try to arrest the violence." In other words, he repeatedly freelanced and deftly used his allies in Washington to make the case for a very different sort of policy.

Those who knew Blair during these years say that he clearly aspired to be chairman of the Joint Chiefs. But, in the early days of the Bush era, he found himself locked in combat with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. In part, their conflict was structural. Rumsfeld wanted increased oversight of the combatant commanders by installing civilian representatives in each of their headquarters. "Rummy wanted to break the Joint Chiefs' dominance," says a former NSC staffer.

But there were substantive differences over Pacific Rim policy, too. Blair believed that the United States had unwisely cast its lot with Taiwan—he reportedly told a congressional panel in 1999 that the island is "the turd in the punchbowl" of Sino-American relations (Blair disputed the context of the remark)—and advocated a less adversarial stance toward China. This position, which was shared by most of Blair's predecessors at PACOM, would repeatedly bring him into conflict with the Bushies. The first instance came when a Chinese fighter pilot collided with a U.S. EP-3 spy plane flying in international airspace. When the damaged U.S. jet managed to land on Hainan Island, just off the coast of China, the Chinese held the 24-member crew in custody. As Blair worked with Joseph Prueher, the American ambassador to China, to negotiate their release, the civilians at the Pentagon were horrified at their conciliatory tone. One official recalls them issuing "accomodationist messages to the Chinese on the naïve theory that a quick apology and abasing ourselves would work." Rumsfeld worried that they neglected to exact any costs from the Chinese as they hammered out an agreement. Indeed, the Pentagon reeled at the concessions that were made. Even though the EP-3 was in perfectly reparable condition, they consented to China's demand that the plane be dismantled by American military contractors and shipped home in crates.

In May 2001, just a month after the EP-3 incident, Blair took his differences with the defense secretary public. A study commissioned by Rumsfeld had warned that U.S. bases in the Pacific would become increasingly vulnerable to Chinese attacks in various conflict scenarios and recommended that the United States shift its resources to capabilities like missile defense and space weaponry. Blair disagreed, not only with the recommendations, but also with the threat assessment. "I think that using this projection of what the Chinese are now doing as a rationale for the U.S. having to flow back out of Asia is just wrong," Blair told *The New York Times* in a front-page story. The article quoted him recommending that the United States spend more time working on its "alliance structure" rather than fretting about exaggerated warnings of Chinese bellicosity.

It was the public voicing of these doubts that bruised Blair's relationship with Rumsfeld—and his chances for promotion. The circumstances of his departure are murky. While officials at the Pentagon say that he left after failing to win the Joint Chiefs job, Blair privately

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claimed that he was fired. According to one official who worked with Blair, "He said that to me, to many people. I've heard it repeated back more than a half-dozen times."

Dissident status in the Rumsfeld Pentagon obviously makes for a good credential in Democratic foreign policy circles. But Blair still wasn't a natural denizen of the Obama camp. After retiring from the Navy, Blair joined a series of corporate boards and became president of the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA), a federally funded think tank that advises the Pentagon on weapons procurement. In 2006, it was revealed that Blair served on the boards of two corporations that made parts for the F-22 fighter jet, whose continued construction IDA had endorsed (and which Congress canceled last year). Blair acknowledged that he was involved in two reports endorsing the plane. An inspector general investigation was launched at the behest of Senator John McCain and his colleagues John Warner and Carl Levin. The inquiry concluded that Blair "took no action to influence the outcome of either study," but it also found that he "violated IDA's conflict of interest standards." In July 2006, Blair resigned from one of his corporate board positions; after heightened media scrutiny, he quit the presidency of IDA, too. Blair blamed much of his fate on the Arizona senator, a bitterness that hasn't abated. "He portrayed himself to me and many others as a victim of John McCain, whom he found to be irresponsible and wrongheaded," says one former colleague.

How Blair got the DNI position remains opaque. Before being approached for the job, he'd only spoken once with Obama, way back in 2006. "He was not particularly involved with President Obama in the campaign," says Danzig, who was a top foreign policy adviser during the race. So, when Blair received the job offer, he professed shock. "I was quite surprised to receive a phone call from him asking me to join his team," Blair told reporters in March. Whatever the circumstances of his recruitment, Blair clearly had a profile that appealed to Obama: intellectual, a proven history of engaging adversaries, and a willingness to candidly express his opinion with superiors. The latter quality jibed with the prevailing liberal critique of the intelligence community, which held that, in the Bush era, analysts bent their evidence to win the approval of their political bosses.

But it is this maverick quality that has landed Blair in several controversies. The first began when word leaked that he had asked Charles Freeman, who had served as ambassador to Saudi Arabia and director for Chinese affairs at the State Department, to be chairman of the National Intelligence Council, the government's top intelligence analyst. The choice raised the ire of a diverse group of Israel supporters, China hawks, and Darfur activists. For instance, of the Tiananmen Square massacre, Freeman once wrote to an e-mail listserv that the "truly unforgivable mistake of the Chinese authorities was the failure to intervene on a timely basis to nip the demonstrations in the bud." In his position as head of the Middle East Policy Council, a Saudi-funded think tank, Freeman published an "unabridged" version of the controversial "Israel Lobby" essay by professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. Until February 2009, Freeman had served on the international advisory board of the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation, a government-owned conglomerate with stakes in Sudanese petroleum.

As controversy swirled, Blair steadfastly defended Freeman. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, he said, "I'm better off getting strong analytical viewpoints … than if I'm getting pre-cooked pabulum judgments that don't really challenge." But his backing of Freeman did little good. Just hours after Blair left the Senate hearing room, Freeman, likely bowing to pressure from the White House, withdrew his name from consideration. In a rambling letter blaming "the Israel Lobby," Freeman claimed to be done in by "unscrupulous people" who were "intent on enforcing the will and interests of a foreign government."

A few days before Freeman bowed out, Blair's spokeswoman acknowledged that he did not seek prior White House approval of the selection, a rather daring move given the problems a figure like Freeman posed to so many constituencies. And, even after the controversy, Blair told reporters, "I thought [Freeman] was a good pick, I still think he would have made a great National Intelligence Council chairman, but it wasn't to be."

Introducing Blair for his January confirmation hearings, Senator Dianne Feinstein cited a description of the incoming DNI as "one of those who could think outside the box." That was, in essence, what attracted him to Freeman. Both men envision themselves as truth-tellers working amid a sea of conformists.

But this headstrong quality has thrust Blair into the center of myriad intra-administration debates. His assessment of Tehran's nuclear program, for instance, stands at odds with the evaluations of our European allies, international watchdog agencies, and even other branches of the U.S government. Last March, Blair told a Senate committee, "Whether [the Iranians] develop a nuclear weapon which could then be put in [a] warhead I believe is a separate decision which Iran has not made yet." That's a strong stance, without much hedging, and inimical to the view of Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Just a day after Blair's testimony, Mullen told a Washington audience, "I believe that Iran is on a path to develop nuclear weapons. We can debate the timeline, but it's very clear to me that that's their path and that's what their leadership is about." A frustrated Feinstein told *Congressional Quarterly*, "You have one admiral saying one thing and one admiral saying another, I'm not going to get into the middle." As late as September, according to *Newsweek*, Blair's office told the White House that it continues to stand by the conclusions of the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate that Iran was not presently developing nukes.

All this has played out against the backdrop of Blair's contretemps with Panetta. And, while their squabble has nothing directly to do with the Abdulmutallab case, it is reflective of a dysfunctional intelligence culture. But, thus far, none of these failures has redounded against Blair. That's because, as much as Blair has a talent for provocations, he also knows when to cool his jets. "He'll be very good at staying below the radar. This has been key to his career," one of Blair's former colleagues told me. And so, the man who officially has ownership over the intelligence community has largely avoided blame for this spectacular intelligence failure.

In a sense, for Blair to succeed in this next chapter, he will have to overcome his own temperament. He's a self-styled maverick, ever willing to prod. Or, as his friend Strobe Talbott says, "He's a speak-truth-to power guy." That's an admirable quality for an analyst, but it may not be the ideal defining quality for someone tasked with taming a sprawling bureaucracy. To enact the improvements that the president has demanded, Blair must accept a truce in his battle with the CIA; he will need to bolster the morale of agencies that feel trampled, fostering a sense of collective mission. In other words, Blair will only be able to execute this agenda by fighting another turf war—and this time, his enemy will be his own ego. ◆

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Post Apocalypse

Inside the messy collapse of a great newspaper.

GABRIEL SHERMAN

On July 2 of last year, *Politico* broke a startling story: *The Washington Post* was planning to host off-the-record salons at which sponsors would pay to mingle with D.C. eminences and *Post* writers. The dinners—the first of which had been advertised in *Post* fliers as an "exclusive opportunity to participate in the health-care reform debate among the select few who will actually get it done"—were to take place at the home of Katharine Weymouth, the *Post*'s publisher.

Weymouth, granddaughter of legendary *Post* owner Katharine Graham, had only been on the job for a year and a half. Now she was at the center of a potentially major journalistic scandal. Even though she was on vacation in Europe at the time, she was quick to react. "Absolutely, I'm disappointed," she told *Post* media reporter Howard Kurtz. "This should never have happened. The fliers got out and weren't vetted." A few days later, Weymouth penned a letter apologizing to readers. But that wasn't enough to make the matter go away. The paper's ombudsman, Andrew Alexander, soon published an investigation concluding that Weymouth and other top *Post* employees had been intimately involved in planning the salons and knew about their off-the-record status. The episode, Alexander wrote, constituted "an ethical lapse of monumental proportions."

Eugene Meyer, father of Katharine Graham, owned the Post *when it merged with* The Washington Times-Herald *in 1954.*

What Alexander didn't say, and what Weymouth never quite admitted, was that the salons had, in fact, been her idea. Weymouth had wanted to get the *Post* into the conference business even before she was promoted to publisher, according to two senior executives close to her. "She had floated the [salon] idea several times," says one of the executives. "There was no enthusiasm on the sales side to pursue it." But Weymouth was determined to make the dinners happen, envisioning them as the first iteration of a series of ambitious conferences that would attract advertisers and readers.

Last spring, the *Post* recruited Charles Pelton, a fifty-two-year-old event planner whose firm had helped organize corporate-sponsored conferences for *The Economist* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Pelton was given an office in the *Post* executive suite. According to one source, Pelton was more interested in planning large conferences than salons, which didn't need his level of expertise and were, moreover, financially irrelevant. (At most, the events would generate around half a million dollars, an amount that wouldn't contribute any meaningful revenue to the *Post*'s bottom line.) But, given that it would be easier to plan the salons than the conferences, Pelton decided to start with the smaller events. He did, however, disagree with Weymouth about the venue: He believed her four-bedroom Chevy Chase house was too far outside the city center and not sophisticated enough for a high-level gathering. Instead, he suggested using a downtown restaurant, while another executive proposed the Georgetown residence of Sally Quinn and Ben Bradlee. But Weymouth rebuffed both ideas: She wanted the salons held at her home.

After the news of the salons surfaced in July, the events were canceled and the paper scuttled plans to host a larger conference modeled on Davos. Two months later, Pelton resigned. But, by then, the damage from salongate, as it came to be known, was done. Publicly, the *Post* had been humiliated; privately, the scandal had left the newsroom questioning the judgment of both Weymouth and Marcus Brauchli, the paper's new editor. Brauchli had been on the job for only a year, and it was soon revealed that he, too, had been involved in planning the dinners. "I've been very upset by all this stuff," one senior *Post* staffer told me recently. "It's like, oh God, who are these people?"

Why had Weymouth been so intent on holding the salons? One theory was that she was simply naïve. "This was inexperience on her part," says former *Post* executive editor Len Downie. Another held that her ego was to blame. "I think Katharine wants to relive the glory days of her grandmother," says one executive, alluding to Katharine Graham's legendary dinner parties. (When I spoke to her recently, Weymouth declined to revisit the salon episode.) But, whatever the explanation, one thing seemed undeniable: *The Washington Post* was a desperate paper, and, in pushing the salons, Weymouth had essentially been casting about for anything, large or small, that might help to save it. Over the past year, the *Post* has folded its business section into the A-section, killed its book review, revamped its Sunday magazine, and redesigned the entire paper and website, while organizationally merging the print and online editions. Hundreds of staffers have left the *Post* since 2003, thanks to four rounds of buyouts. In 2008, the *Post* began losing money; in 2009, its advertising revenue dropped by $100 million. All of this while the paper was under siege from new competitors,

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national and local. "The common storyline is the *Post* is flailing," a senior reporter says. "To me, it's slightly different. It's throwing everything up there to see what sticks." "Everybody feels like we're lurching," says another reporter. "A company in chaos" is how a third *Post* staffer describes the state of the paper.

The *Post*, of course, is not alone; other large newspapers are suffering financially as well. And yet, the *Post*'s financial decline is only part of the story. Over the past few months, I have talked to about 50 current and former reporters, editors, Web staffers, and business employees. From these conversations, a picture has emerged of a paper suffering an identity crisis. Its peers seem to have coherent strategies for saving themselves: *The New York Times* is doubling down on journalism in the belief that it can persevere online as the global newspaper of record; *The Wall Street Journal* remains the country's definitive chronicler of business; other large papers have tried to distinguish themselves by burrowing into local issues. But the *Post* seems to be paralyzed—and trapped. It can't go completely local because the local news in Washington is, in many respects, national; and its status as the paper of record for national politics is under assault from numerous competitors—competitors it isn't clear the *Post* can defeat. Meanwhile, the tense, even hostile, relationship between the print and online divisions hasn't made the paper's search for a coherent identity any easier. And so, in a new era for journalism, *The Washington Post* has yet to figure out what it wants to be. The result has been a lot of lurching—some of it (like salongate) embarrassing, much of it merely ineffective, but almost all of it suggesting a newspaper in disarray.

Watergate turned the *Post* into one of the most famous newspapers in the world. But what brought the *Post* fame never brought in much money. National and international news weren't lucrative for the paper. Instead, the *Post*'s financial performance was fueled by its domination of the local market. Currently, the paper—print and online combined—penetrates 63 percent of local households, which, according to the *Post*, is the highest percentage among the ten largest metropolitan newspapers.

Looming over this history was also a bit of good luck that may have ultimately backfired: In my conversations with *Post* staffers, they repeatedly cited Katharine Graham's prescient purchase of Kaplan, the education and test-prep company, as a source of financial strength that bolstered the *Post* when the newspaper industry began struggling in recent years. But the success of Kaplan may have also provided a financial cushion that insulated the *Post* from making changes necessary to survive in a new climate.

While the *Post*'s most famous editor was Ben Bradlee, it was Len Downie's seventeen-year tenure as editor that did far more to shape the institution's culture. "The paper was sexy after Watergate, but it was erratic," a former senior staffer says. "Len professionalized the newsroom." Downie's judgment and earnestness—he famously refused to vote so he wouldn't have any appearance of political bias and loved stories about tornados and hurricanes—was a source of confidence for *Post* editors and reporters. "The reason salongate never would have happened with Len," a former senior editor says, "is that Len would have heard the idea and he would have said, 'It's a stupid idea, don't come to me with this shit. We're doing journalism here.'"

But Downie and Don Graham—Katharine's son, who succeeded her as publisher—were slow to adapt, even as the media world was fracturing around them. Much of their strategy was built around bulking up local coverage and expanding deeper into the D.C. suburbs. Graham also famously separated the print and Web departments—sending the online division to Arlington, Virginia.

Beginning in the late 1990s, a debate over the *Post*'s identity developed in the newsroom, as the Web made it possible to reach readers anywhere, at virtually no cost. On one side was Steve Coll, a brilliant foreign correspondent who had been promoted to managing editor. After *New York Times* chairman Arthur Sulzberger strong-armed the Grahams out of the *Post*'s 50 percent stake in the *International Herald Tribune* in 2002, Coll led a task force that proposed using up to $10 million from the proceeds of the *IHT* sale to build up the *Post*'s national and international coverage. Graham rejected the idea. "Don's feeling at that time was it wasn't about the dollars; at that point, the paper was minting money," a former senior staffer says. "The fear was: If we invest in the national audience, the delicate balance will shift away from the local audience."

By the early part of this decade, Downie had held onto power too long and stunted the ambitions of the editors coming up behind him. "Len wouldn't do things they felt needed to be done," says former *Post* political reporter Peter Baker, who left the paper for the *Times* in 2008. "A whole generation of younger editors were smothered by a leadership that was resistant to change." In August 2005, Coll, who was a newsroom favorite and Downie's logical successor, announced he was leaving to join *The New Yorker* as a staff writer. "If Len had decided to retire after 2002, Coll wouldn't have left the paper," says a former senior staffer. Explains another: "Particularly as financial pressures grew, editors were spending all their time on thankless budgets, cutting the budgets, going to meetings to try to figure out how to do more with less resources, and figuring out how to reorganize the place under the shadow of a guy who didn't want these things to happen." ("I may have been excessively hands-on, though you can never see it in yourself," Downie told me. "I don't know if I stifled anyone under me.")

Like Coll, John Harris was in the ambitious generation of staffers in their forties who chafed under Downie. Harris had joined the *Post* as an intern in 1985 and risen to become the paper's national politics editor. In directing the *Post*'s coverage of the 2006 midterm elections, he saw how radically the Web and cable news had changed journalism. And he knew that the *Post* was woefully unprepared for these new realities. The Web and print sides rarely collaborated, with print editors disdaining the Web culture.

In October 2006, Harris and White House correspondent Jim VandeHei secretly met with Robert Allbritton, who owns a string of TV stations, to discuss their plans to launch a politics-only Web venture. At the time, Allbritton was planning to start a Capitol Hill newspaper to take on *Roll Call* and *The Hill*. Harris and VandeHei convinced him to think bigger. They envisioned a Web-focused organization that would compete not just inside the Beltway for congressional scoops, but with the national political press corps—and the *Post* itself.

Downie counter-offered and told Harris and VandeHei they could manage a staff of eight to ten if they developed their project in-house. But Harris and VandeHei had plans to staff a newsroom of 100 reporters and editors. In November, they left the paper. Many of the people I spoke with agreed that the decision to let them walk out the door ended up being a disaster for the *Post*. "What a mistake," says Baker. "The most obvious indictment is the failure to foresee what opportunities were out there that John Harris and Jim had created."

In the wake of Harris and VandeHei's departure, managing editor Phil Bennett installed Susan Glasser to run the

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paper's national desk. As a foreign correspondent, and then the well-regarded editor of the *Post*'s Outlook section, Glasser (who is married to Baker) had established herself as a rising star. And she was one of the few print staffers to embrace the Web. But, as a manager, Glasser's frequent clashes with her staff roiled the newsroom and spilled into unflattering articles in the *Washington City Paper* and *Washingtonian*. Morale plummeted. Her aggressive push for political coverage put the *Post* in competition for scoops with *Politico* during the 2008 race, but also angered some staffers who disagreed with her news judgment. "The coverage of Washington became much more inside-baseball coverage," one former staffer told me. At a newsroom meeting in February 2008, shortly after Hillary Clinton fired her campaign manager, Patti Solis Doyle, reporter Carol Leonnig asked Downie why the *Post* had run three political stories off the front page—including one on Solis Doyle's departure and another mentioning it—on the same day. "You might have thought Patti would have been shot," Leonnig said, according to three people present. "This is what *The Washington Post* does," Downie retorted.

Despite defending Glasser to the newsroom, Downie and senior *Post* management began to recognize a growing problem. In April, Glasser's eighteen-month tenure on the national desk ended after a panel overseen by human-resources editor Tom Wilkinson investigated her management practices. Days later, Baker quit the *Post* to join the *Times*. "I left because of what happened to my wife," he told me. Baker, who grew up in suburban Montgomery County and idolized the *Post*, is still raw over his wife's experience. "I never wanted to go to *The New York Times*," he says. "I wanted to work at *The Washington Post* for the rest of my life. . . . Having said that, looking at the way things are today, there's part of me—I'm glad I'm not there. It would be very depressing."

The Glasser episode was among the first management decisions for Weymouth, who had been named publisher two months earlier. A lawyer by training, Weymouth was the daughter of Lally Weymouth, one of Katharine Graham's four children. Despite hailing from Washington royalty, she grew up outside the Beltway bubble on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. She studied ballet and went to Harvard and then Stanford Law School. In contrast to her grandmother, Weymouth was relatively unknown on the D.C. social circuit. "Katharine lives in a modest house and drives her kids around in a van," a senior *Post* executive says. "And yet, I think she wants the stature that comes with being publisher. I'm not sure how you reconcile all of that."

Unlike her uncle Don, who spent a year in the newsroom as a metro reporter, Weymouth had come up exclusively through the business side of the paper. At most major papers, the business and news departments view each other suspiciously, and the *Post* was no exception. The business staff felt that the news side condescended to local readers. While the paper raked in money covering local issues, the ethos of the *Post* newsroom was defined by its national and foreign reporting. "She drank down some of the High Church newsroom criticism," a former senior staffer says. "The business side thought, 'They've lost touch with their readers; they don't care about firemen.'" "She missed the year that Don had [in the newsroom] where he got to know editors, but, more than that, he got to know the ethic," says veteran reporter Walter Pincus. "Literally, she only knew five or six of us." Downie told me he had wanted Weymouth to join the newsroom and discussed the idea with her on several occasions in the late 1990s and early 2000s—but the timing never worked, given her increasing role on the business side.

A few months into her tenure, Weymouth took a group of senior *Post* employees to Harvard Business School for a weeklong corporate boot camp. That retreat kicked off a series of high-level strategy meetings at the *Post* that continued through much of 2008, as Weymouth tried to figure out a way forward for the paper. The financial picture was downright awful. Advertising, already weak, had taken a secondary dive in the wake of the economic crisis. Once again, the question of the *Post*'s identity was at the heart of the discussions. Should the *Post* go hyper-local, as was in vogue in newspaper circles? Should it redouble its political coverage to counter the *Politico* threat? Would the Web or print dominate?

Near the end of 2008, *Post* president Stephen Hills met with Weymouth and the top brass to deliver his final recommendations. The conclusion was that print was just too valuable to deemphasize. To illustrate the point, according to one participant in the meeting, Hills put up a chart showing that a daily print subscriber represents $500 in revenue for the paper, while a website reader brings in only $6. "In Steve's presentation, he was completely focused on the print paper," the participant recalls. "If

Katharine Graham and Ben Bradlee steered the Post *to a new level of prominence.*

"She was looking for a magic solution, for a person to cut the budget, shrink the mission of the paper, and make people happy."

AP

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

Myths About Israel and the Middle East (1)

Do the media feed us fiction instead of fact?

We all know that, by dint of constant repetition, white can be made to appear black, good can get transformed into evil, and myth may take the place of reality. Israel, with roughly one-thousandth of the world's population and with a similar fraction of the territory of this planet, seems to engage a totally disproportionate attention of the print and broadcast media of the world. Unfortunately, much of what the media tell us — in reporting, editorializing in columns, and in analysis — are endlessly repeated myths.

What are the facts?

■ **Myth:** The "Palestinians" are a nation and therefore deserving of a homeland.

Reality: The concept of Palestinian nationhood is a new one and had not been heard of until after the Six-Day War (1967), when Israel, by its victory, came into the administration of the territories of Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip. The so-called "Palestinians" are no more different from the Arabs living in the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, than Wisconsinites are from Iowans.

■ **Myth:** Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip are "occupied Arab territory."

Reality: All of "Palestine" — east and west of the Jordan River — was part of the League of Nations mandate. Under the Balfour Declaration, all of it was to be the "national home for the Jewish people." In violation of this mandate, Great Britain severed the entire area east of the Jordan River — about 75% of Palestine — and gave it to the Arabs, who created on it the kingdom of Transjordan. When Israel declared its independence in 1948, five Arab armies invaded the new country in order to destroy it at its very birth. They were defeated by the Israelis. The Transjordanians, however, remained in occupation of Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") and East Jerusalem. They proceeded to drive all Jews from those territories and to systematically destroy all Jewish houses of worship and other institutions. The Transjordanians (now renamed "Jordanians") were the occupiers for nineteen years. Israel regained these territories following its victory in the Six-Day War. Israel has returned the entire Gaza Strip to the Palestinians. The final status of the "West Bank" will be decided if and when the Palestinians will finally be able to sit down and seriously talk peace with Israel.

■ **Myth:** Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") are the "greatest obstacle to peace."

Reality: This is simply not correct, although it has been repeated so often that many have come to believe it. The greatest obstacle to peace is the intransigence and the irreconcilable hostility of the Arabs. Not more than 200,000 Jews are settled in these territories, living among about 1.4 million Arabs. How can Jews living there be an obstacle to peace? Why shouldn't they live there? About 1.2 million Arabs live in Israel proper. They are not an obstacle to peace. Neither the Israelis nor they themselves consider them as such.

> "Peace will only come when the Arabs finally accept the reality of Israel. And that is not a myth — that is a fact!"

■ **Myth:** Israel is unwilling to yield "land for peace."

Reality: The concept that to the loser, rather than to the victor, belong the spoils is a radically new one, never before thought of in world history. Israel has emerged victorious in the five wars imposed on it by the Arabs. In order to make peace, it has returned over 90% of the territory occupied by it, specifically the vast Sinai Peninsula, to Egypt. That territory contained some of the most advanced military installations in the world, prosperous cities and settlements, and oil fields developed entirely by Israel that made it independent of petroleum imports. In the Camp David Accords, Israel agreed to autonomy for Judea and Samaria (the "West Bank") with the permanent status to be determined after three years. But no responsible Palestinian representation has been available to negotiate with Israel about this.

All these myths (and others we shall talk about) have poisoned the atmosphere for decades. The root cause of the never-ending conflict is the unwillingness of the Arabs (and not just the Palestinians) to accept the reality of Israel. What a pity that those of the Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens have lived and continue to live in poverty, misery and ignorance. They could have chosen to accept the proposed partition of the country in 1947, would now have had their state alongside Israel for over sixty years and could have lived in peace and prosperity. They could have kept hundreds of thousands of refugees in their homes and could have saved tens of thousands of lives. Peace will only come when the Arabs finally accept the reality of Israel. And that is not a myth — that is a fact!

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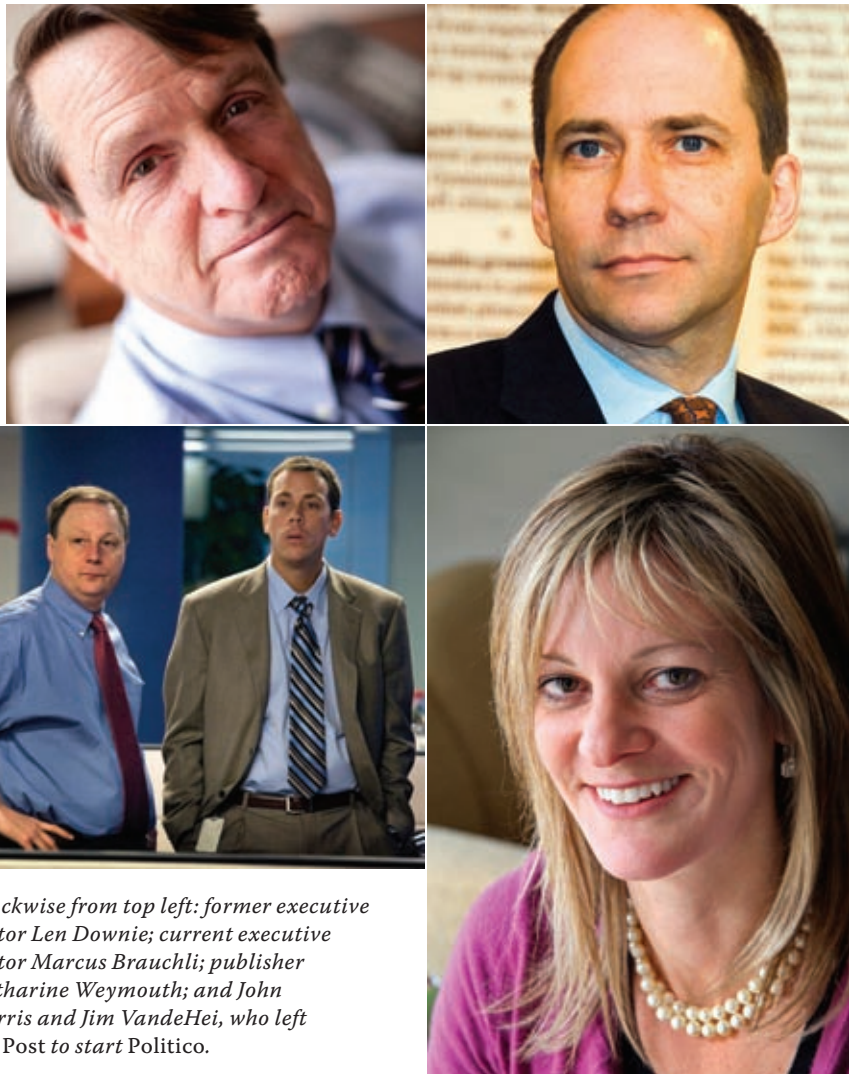
you sat in these meetings, the biggest problem was the person who runs the business side doesn't care about the Web. You bring up mobile and he gets uncomfortable. He'd rather talk about if we should deliver to Charlottesville or not." (Hills did not respond to phone calls. For her part, Weymouth defends the *Post*'s balance between Web and print. "Print is still the revenue driver now," she says. "We are conscious that the Web is a critical part of the future. We are navigating our way through this transition.")

Even as Weymouth was rethinking the paper's business model, she had also decided that she needed a new executive editor. Some senior staffers I spoke with pointed out that Weymouth and Downie were not particularly close. Her grandmother had named Ben Bradlee; now Weymouth wanted her own pick. At his sixty-sixth birthday celebration in May 2008, Downie told the newsroom staff that he intended to stay until he was 70. He was stung when Weymouth told him shortly thereafter that she was going to seek his replacement. "I was expecting to stay longer," Downie told me.

Phil Bennett was the most prominent internal candidate; others in the running included then–*New York Times* deputy managing editor Jon Landman, former *Post* Style editor David Von Drehle, and *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham. Sources told me that Ben Bradlee pushed for foreign affairs columnist David Ignatius to get the job. "She was looking for a magic solution, for a person to cut the budget, shrink the mission of the paper, and make people happy," recalls one candidate Weymouth interviewed. "They wanted to shrink the paper, close sections. All kinds of ugly stuff. It was a hairy, hairy combination. And it's kind of an impossible job."

In the end, Weymouth settled on Brauchli, the then–forty-seven-year-old former managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*. At the *Journal*, Brauchli had burnished his image as a winsome foreign correspondent—investing in a nightclub in Shanghai and regaling *Journal* reporters back in New York with his exploits from the field—before ascending to the paper's top job. But he lasted less than a year, quitting in the wake of Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of the *Journal* and reportedly getting millions in severance pay in the process. Soon enough, however, he was a candidate to lead the *Post*. Part of Brauchli's appeal was likely that he had begun the process of merging the *Journal*'s print and online operations—something that Weymouth wanted the *Post* to do. "I think it was an inspired choice," Paul Steiger, who preceded Brauchli as managing editor of the *Journal*, told me. "This is a guy who is a great journalist, who has a great feel for the Web, and he brings to *The Washington Post* a great feel for finance and economics—things which the *Post* had, but it needs more of them in the environment of the present or the future."

Post staff about how he had impressed Weymouth: After Brauchli interviewed with the publisher over breakfast near her home, she offered to give him a ride to the newsroom in her convertible BMW. On the drive downtown, Weymouth supposedly freaked out when a spider jumped into the car. Brauchli calmly removed the bug. As one former senior *Post* staffer says, "It was the you're-my-hero moment." Well, not exactly, Weymouth explains. "It was not relevant on my radar screen," she told me. "But since you ask, it is true there was a spider."



Clockwise from top left: former executive editor Len Downie; current executive editor Marcus Brauchli; publisher Katharine Weymouth; and John Harris and Jim VandeHei, who left the Post *to start* Politico.

Still, his appointment took many by surprise. He was the first outsider to run the paper, and he had virtually no experience in domestic politics or metro coverage, the *Post*'s core franchises. A few months after Brauchli arrived, some staffers took to calling him "Count Brauchula" and circulated an e-mail containing a photo of Brauchli with red eyes and fangs. In addition, a story spread among

One of the biggest challenges facing Brauchli was how to merge the *Post*'s online and print operations. For more than a decade, the *Post*'s website had been based across the Potomac in Arlington, while its newsroom was in Washington. Weymouth and Brauchli decided to bring the two divisions together and commissioned a dramatic renovation of the *Post*'s downtown head-

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHUCK KENNEDY/MCT/LANDOV; MARC BRYAN-BROWN/WIREIMAGE; JAMES M. THRESHER/WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES; DANIEL ROSENBAUM/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

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quarters. The move did not go smoothly for either side. The newsroom was gutted, and, during the construction this past summer, staffers worked either from their homes or out of makeshift quarters on the third floor and a windowless room on the ground level dubbed "The Gulag"—"a friggin' sweatshop," as one senior editor on the print side described it. Meanwhile, from the Web staff came complaints about the print side's decision to do away with perks like serving online staffers free bagels on Mondays.

But beyond the trivial grumblings were real philosophical divides. Print staffers grouse about the quality of the website. "Why does our homepage look so crappy and cheesy?" one reporter says. "Why is it not as nice as the *Times*'s page?" Others complain that Web producers don't appreciate the *Post*'s august traditions.

In late October, Brauchli had to physically intervene when an editor punched a writer in the newsroom.

Some in the newsroom felt the frenzied coverage of the White House party-crasher scandal was driven in part by the millions of hits the story generated. A week after the story broke, Style editor Ned Martel convened a meeting attended by 25 reporters and editors to coordinate coverage of the scandal. "If I were to call a similar meeting on Al Qaeda's recruitment in the U.S., you know what I would get? I might get two people there," says a senior print staffer. "You'd have trouble getting support on the Web to mobilize."

The online side counters that the print staff doesn't understand the Web. "At the *Post*, the Neanderthals won," one former senior Web staffer told me recently. "The overall mentality on the print side is dismissive and dictatorial." Since Weymouth took over, both the website's publisher and top editor have quit—and, in a brash challenge to the *Post*'s dominance in local reporting, the online editor, Jim Brady, is now planning to launch a metro website with backing from the same media empire that owns *Politico*.

And, when the two sides *have* collaborated, the results haven't always been pretty. This summer, political reporters Dana Milbank and Chris Cillizza filmed a series of a dozen or so Web videos called "Mouthpiece Theater." In one episode spoofing Obama's beer summit with Henry Louis Gates and the Cambridge policeman who arrested him, Milbank joked that Hillary Clinton should drink "mad bitch" beer. The scripts for "Mouthpiece Theater" were e-mailed to Brauchli and other senior editors for approval a few hours before each episode. But, while Brauchli signed off on the "mad bitch" script before the episode was cut, he says he didn't see the graphics that would be paired with the dialogue. It was a reasonable excuse, since Hillary Clinton's name never appeared in the script; her face simply flashed across the screen as Milbank said the words "mad bitch." Still, the bigger problem is why anyone thought the video—as a whole, decidedly unfunny—was fit to be aired, with or without the reference to Clinton. The entire controversy—which ended with Brauchli canceling the series—left the impression that the *Post* was aimlessly producing Web content in the hope that something, anything, would catch on.

The biggest change prompted by the Web-print merger has been a shift in the way the *Post* edits. Modeling his new system in part on the *Journal*'s, Brauchli divided editors into two classes: one that would assign stories and manage teams of reporters; and another, known as the Universal News Desk, that would edit stories continuously. The idea was to help the *Post* update its website throughout the day. But the system engendered ill will on both sides of the new divide. When Brauchli announced the change at a town hall meeting last spring, many editors slated to be assigned to the Universal News Desk felt that he characterized their new jobs as glorified copy-editing positions. Since then, editors running teams of reporters have often clashed with Universal News Desk editors whom they see as meddling with their assignments. "You're always in these shitty little arguments about, 'Why are you talking to my reporters?'" one assigning editor says. Brauchli acknowledges the complaints but says the system will result in a more efficient publishing process. "Change of this magnitude," he says, "requires time to settle in."

Brauchli may have rankled some of his employees, but he still has the support of the most famous person in the *Post* newsroom. Bob Woodward told me that, until this past September, he did not know Brauchli particularly well. Then, on the evening of Friday, September 18, Woodward received a copy of General Stanley McChrystal's confidential report to the White House, warning that the Afghanistan mission could end in "failure" if more troops weren't deployed. Woodward e-mailed Brauchli, who immediately wrote back that the two should meet in the morning at the *Post*. After a series of talks with Pentagon and administration officials, Woodward's bombshell made it into the paper on Monday morning. "To an old-timer, and I fall in the old-fart category," Woodward told me, "when you have something new that's classified, that's at the center of government debate and business and they don't want you to publish it—all the machinery the government can muster—and one editor, and that's Marcus, says, 'We're doing this'? It's more than encouraging."

The article was also a reminder of the *Post*'s enduring ability to break important stories—which the paper still does with impressive regularity. (Brauchli pointed out that, shortly before we spoke in early January, the *Post* had broken several major political stories—the decisions of Senators Chris Dodd and Byron Dorgan, as well as Colorado Governor Bill Ritter, not to seek reelection—on the same day.) Meanwhile, the easing of the financial crisis of 2008 has stabilized the paper's finances. According to multiple sources, the *Post* returned to profitability in the final three months of 2009. And Brauchli is trying to reestablish support among staffers. He has taken groups of reporters out to dinner, while making himself more of a presence in the newsroom.

But none of these developments, however promising, changes the fact that the *Post* remains a newspaper in distress—in late October, Brauchli had to physically intervene when an editor punched a writer in the newsroom—and, most importantly, one without a strong identity. And so, the paper's institutional lurches continue. On November 24, the *Post* announced that it was shuttering its remaining domestic bureaus to focus its resources in Washington—a sign that, once again, local journalism had won out. Then, in December, the *Post* printed a news piece on the national debt in partnership with a publication called *The Fiscal Times*—without disclosing that the organization is backed by financier Pete Peterson, a well-known deficit hawk. Again, the *Post* found itself at the center of an ethics scandal. And another attempt at experimenting seemed to have backfired.

Weymouth says the changes of the past year—however chaotic—were necessary to save the paper. Her job, she told me, is "to make sure the *Post* is here for generations to come." But that *Post* will look very different from the one her grandmother ran. "It clearly is a smaller paper," says Walter Pincus. "It's not going to go back to where it was." ◆

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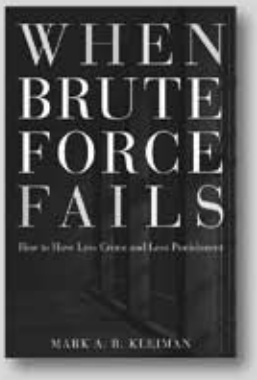

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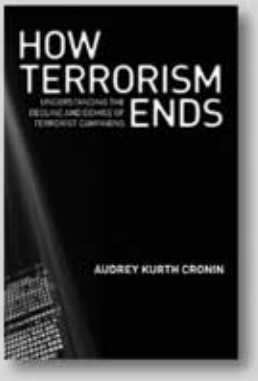

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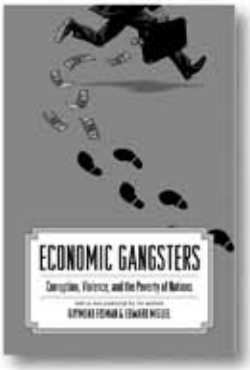

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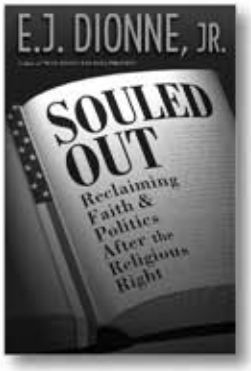

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

A PAWN, A QUEEN

The Romanian director Corneliu Porumboiu shows once again that, for him, film is a means of looking at an idea. The operative word is "looking." The subtitles of *Police, Adjective* convey that his dialogue is reasoned and seasoned, but it rarely seems primary. Chiefly, it enhances what we are watching. Ideas are hardly a novelty in films, but some such works present their ideas visually, as do Porumboiu's.

He provides just enough plot to assure us that he hasn't forgotten about it. His characters, in their less than spectacular way, encounter just enough action to support the attention he gives them.

His first feature, *12:08 East of Bucharest*, took place in a TV studio in a small town where a talk-show host was trying to celebrate the departure of Nicolae Ceaușescu sixteen years earlier. The apathy and evasions he met in the people he invited as guests resulted in funny dull stretches of the film and vivified a basic idea: most people's political ideal, as this host found, is not to participate in possible glory but to be left alone.

Police, Adjective promises, with cool deception, more of a story. At the start a youth comes out of a house into an empty street and walks away. A man then comes around a corner and follows him. Tailing! A police thriller! Well, it certainly is a police story, as it turns out, but it is mostly about the detective and the idea of being one.

The place is a town called Vaslui, the director's birthplace, and he has chosen to focus on some shabby poured-concrete sections. Every exterior shot is under a gray sky. In fact, the atmosphere is so drab and the detective is pouring his day into such small-scale work that the film soon acquires a patina of humor—without anything like a laugh. Through meetings with bosses and hours of spying, we learn that the detective has been ordered to tail this youth to track down the distribution of hashish to a few high school students. The subject is not trifling: still, the intense police activity seems disproportionate.

Ultimately, underlying this inflation, the reticent film discloses two themes. First, there is a conflict in Cristi, the detective, between morality and legality. The police chief wants him to set up a sting operation to trap the youth. Cristi says, and his chief even agrees, that the law regarding hashish will soon be changed. If they carry out the sting, they will have sent a youth to prison for seven years under a law that will be repealed while he is in prison. The chief tries to show Cristi, actually by defining words with a dictionary, that he is bound to the legality as it is. The film's last shot reveals the detective's decision about the sting.

But beneath this police drama, there is a larger theme: time—specifically, attitudes toward time. From beginning to end, this picture contravenes the usual handling of time in film. Cristi's waiting—for the suspect to move, for various officials to see him—suggests that he himself has been altered by his work. His job, its routine, has so possessed him that the normal view of time and its passage has been altered. Jobs of every kind—not only in Romania—impose straits on individuals that alter them, consciously or not. Here it is the concept of time that is changed. I doubt that any film has ever been made that contains more waiting, sheer waiting. We often wait along with Cristi while he waits for the suspect to move.

Most telling is a scene with his chief. When Cristi and a colleague go to see him with a report, an assistant in the waiting room tells the chief on the phone that they are there, and the chief asks her to bring in the report so that he can read it before he talks to them. She takes it in while Cristi and colleague wait—simply wait—until the chief, off-screen, has read the report and admits them. The wait is never tedious for us, because the idea of doing such a thing in a film has to be either stupid, which this could not be, or meaningful, and here the meaning almost saddens us. We sense that, for Cristi, his job has become a kind of refuge. A basic view of time has been arranged for him. Time, as the stuff of life, as the medium of experience, as a source of possibility, has been tamed.

POLICE, ADJECTIVE
IFC Films

THE YOUNG VICTORIA
Apparition

In a way this theme is akin to that of Porumboiu's previous film. There he showed how reluctant many people are to disturb their lives with true political commitment. Here he shows us an acceptance of time-patterns that will, in any large sense, protect this man against new transformative experience—even though a detective's life is less placid than, say, a shoe clerk's. (He is lately married, and what we see of his domestic self is mostly in the temper of his professional self.) We can almost sense gratitude in Cristi. He has achieved what he apparently desired: a snuggle into status quo.

The title of the picture comes from a dictionary definition that is quoted in the chief's office. Like the title of Porumboiu's first feature, this one is a warning, a signal that the picture will be eccentric. He confirms this by casting, as Cristi, Dragos Bucur, an actor who reports for his

ANTHONY RUSSO

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role as the detective reports for work. The chief is strikingly played by Vlad Ivanov, who was the abortionist in *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*. As for Porumboiu, without flamboyant cinematics he is creating a cinematic style by means of his intellect. A different sort of stimulation, not conventional excitement, is what he is after. Hitchcock once said that drama is life with the dull bits left out. With this director, some of the dull bits are left in, but the tedium is both bitterly funny and an instance of comfy submission.

Except for Napoleon and Elizabeth I, Victoria is probably the monarch about whom the greatest number of plays and films have been written. Why this concentration on her? One reason, of course, is the length of her reign, sixty-four years—a reign that saw seismic changes in society, in politics and religion, in styles of living. In the perspective of art, Victoria reigned from the height of romanticism to the surge of modernism. Those factors provide excellent settings for all kinds of drama. (Also, there may be a sort of Max Beerbohm drawing in our heads—a tiny woman and her great, growing empire. "She must have been a very little lady," says a boy watching her funeral cortege in Noël Coward's *Cavalcade*.) Smugly, too, we sometimes like to gloat over the primness of Victoria's time, even though historians have been correcting that view for decades. Now *The Young Victoria* attempts to correct that primness about the monarch herself.

In 1997, *Her Majesty, Mrs. Brown*, through Judi Dench's exquisite performance, winked at the behavior of the elderly queen with her groom John Brown—intimate enough to get her the sly title of the picture. But no kind of intimacy was actually shown. The title of this new film teases otherwise and keeps its word. The story runs from her ascension to her firstborn: her romance and marriage are the core of the picture.

When a producer chooses to make a period film susceptible of magnificence, we can believe that the first person he engages—at least it looks that way—is not the director or the star but the costume designer. We know before *The Young Victoria* begins that it is going to look gorgeous. And so it does: the costumes by Sandy Powell, who did *Shakespeare in Love*, satisfy an appetite that is almost physical. She is warmly aided by the camera of Hagen Bogdanski, who did *The Lives of Others*. He makes many scenes look as if candles and lamps really were the light. The screenplay by Julian Fellowes is as flexed as it can be within the corset of facts. Particularly he decks his script throughout with a decor of gossip—the whisperings and conspirings and assumptions of the relatives and courtiers. The cast helps, with some wonderfully noble ladies and gentlemen—especially Paul Bettany as Lord Melbourne—who provide an obeisance to history.

Because of the film's title, and though the opening sequences are lively, we await the arrival of Prince Albert. Rupert Friend is the Albert we have been wanting to meet. He convinces early on that Victoria's attraction for him is genuine. His attraction for her needs to pass no tests: he charms pretty quickly. She is played by Emily Blunt, who of course is prettier than Victoria was but not disturbingly so. Blunt is adequately regal, without being unduly dominant.

The romance is figuratively and literally danced between them: Albert even takes dancing lessons. The marriage occurs, and then come the scenes for which the film probably was made. She and Albert are in bed together, lying side by side. Then, in her nightdress, she lies on him. That is all. Still—in Windsor Castle! Next, he is kneeling before her, putting a stocking on her leg. Suddenly he pulls it off. She is puzzled. He says they are going back to bed, and she giggles. Windsor Castle or not, they did have nine children.

Albert died at forty-two of typhoid. (It's an English schoolboy joke that the typhoid was a cover story: he really died of excessive marital demands.) The picture ends with their firstborn. It could have ended with their fourth or seventh: the script's structure simply follows the course of things until it stops.

Politics gets its nod. Victoria utters some pieties about helping her poorer subjects when she becomes queen. We are also given some vivid footage of the Chartist riots in the 1840s. A rock goes through a window of Buckingham Palace, and a man fires at the queen as she rides past with Albert in an open carriage. (During her reign, there were six more assassination attempts.) Albert throws himself across her and takes the bullet in his arm. But the political moments are there just so that they won't be missing.

The music, arranged by Maureen Crowe, is always apt. (When the royal pair are courting, Albert mentions that he particularly likes Schubert. Victoria, agreeing but careful not to fawn, says, "I don't mind Schubert.") The direction by Jean-Marc Vallée, a French-Canadian who has made one previous feature, is deft and appreciative: we feel that he really likes the people he is handling. Last, a word of thanks to the ever-welcome Jim Broadbent, whose brief appearance as Victoria's predecessor, William IV, gives the picture a pleasant touch of nuttiness. ◆

Lawrence Lessig
FOR THE LOVE OF CULTURE
Google, copyright, and our future.

I.

In early 2002, the filmmaker Grace Guggenheim—the daughter of the late Charles Guggenheim, one of America's greatest documentarians, and the sister of the filmmaker Davis Guggenheim, who made *An Inconvenient Truth*—decided to do something that might strike most of us as common sense. Her father had directed or produced more than a hundred documentaries. Some of these were quite famous (*Nine from Little Rock*). Some were well-known even if not known to be by him (*Monument to a Dream*, the film that plays at the St. Louis arch). Some were forgotten but incredibly important for understanding American history in the twentieth century (*A Time for Justice*). And some were just remarkably beautiful (*D-Day Remembered*). So, as curator of his work, Grace Guggenheim decided to remaster the collection and make it all available on DVD, which was then the emerging platform for film.

Her project faced two challenges, one obvious, one not. The obvious challenge was technical: gathering fifty years of film and restoring it digitally. The non-obvious challenge was legal: clearing the rights to move this creative work onto this new platform for distribution. Most people might be puzzled about just why there would be any legal issue with a child restoring her father's life's work. After all, when we decide to repaint our grandfather's old desk, or sell it to a neighbor, or use it as a workbench or a kitchen table, no one thinks to call a

Lawrence Lessig is a professor of law at Harvard Law School. His latest book, Remix (Penguin), was published in paperback last year.

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lawyer first. But the property that Grace Guggenheim curates is of a special kind. It is protected by copyright law.

Documentaries in particular are property of a special kind. The copyright and contract claims that burden these compilations of creativity are impossibly complex. The reason is not hard to see. A part of it is the ordinary complexity of copyright in any film. A film is made up of many different creative elements—music, plot, characters, images, and so on. Once the film is made, any effort at remaking it—moving it to DVD, for example—could require clearing permissions for each of these original elements. But documentaries add another layer of complexity to this already healthy thicket, as they typically also include quotations, in the sense of film clips. So just as a book about Franklin Delano Roosevelt by Jonathan Alter might have quotes from famous people talking about its subject, a film about civil rights produced the 1960s would include quotations—clips from news stations—from famous people of the time talking about the issue of the day. Unlike a book, however, these quotations are in film—typically, news footage from CBS or NBC.

Whenever a documentarian wanted to include these clips in his film, he would ask CBS or NBC for permission. Most of the time, at least for a healthy fee, CBS and NBC and everyone else was happy to give permission so as to be included. Sometimes they wanted to see first just how the clip would be used. Sometimes they would veto a particular use in a particular context. But in the main there was a healthy market for securing permission to quote. The lawyers flocked to this market for permission. (That's their nature.) They drafted agreements to define the rights that the quoter would get.

I suspect that most filmmakers never thought for a second about how odd this "permission to quote" was. After all, does an author need to get permission from *The New York Times* when she quotes an article in a book about the Depression? Indeed, does anyone need permission from anyone when quoting public statements, at least in a work talking about those statements? Ordinarily, one would think that this sort of "use" is "fair," under the rules of copyright at least. But most documentarians—indeed, most filmmakers—did not care to work through the complexity and the uncertainty of a doctrine such as "fair use." Instead they agreed to licenses that govern—exclusively, as they typically asserted—the rights to use the quotes that were in the film. So, for example, the license would insist that the only right to use the film came from the license itself (not fair use). And it would then specify the scope and term of the right—five years, North American distribution, for educational use.

What that agreement means is that if the filmmaker wanted to continue to distribute the film after five years, he would have to go back to the original rights holder and ask for permission again. That task may not sound so difficult if you think about one clip in one documentary. But what about twenty, thirty, or more? And even assuming that you can find the original holders of the rights, they now have you over a barrel—as the owners of the famous series *Eyes on the Prize* discovered. Jon Else, the producer and cinematographer for the series, described the problem in 2004 (extraordinary efforts have now resolved it):

> [The series] is no longer available for purchase. It is virtually the only audio-visual purveyor of the history of the civil rights movement in America. What happened was the series was done cheaply and had a terrible fundraising problem. There was barely enough to purchase a minimum five-year rights on the archive-heavy footage. Each episode in the series is fifty percent archival. And most of the archive shots are derived from commercial sources. The five-year licenses expired and the company that made the film also expired. And now we have a situation where we have this series for which there are no rights licenses. *Eyes on the Prize* cannot be broadcast on any TV venue anywhere, nor can it be sold. Whatever threadbare copies are available in universities around the country are the only ones that will ever exist. It will cost five hundred thousand dollars to re-up all the rights for this film.

As American University's Center for Social Media concluded, "rights clearance costs are high, and have escalated dramatically in the last two decades," and "limit the public's access" to documentary film. The consequence of this ecology of creativity is that the vast majority of documentaries from the twentieth century cannot legally be restored or redistributed. They sit on film library shelves, many of them dissolving, since they were produced on nitrate-based film, and most of them forgotten, since no content company or anyone else can do anything with them. In this sense, most of these works have been made orphans by a set

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of agreements concluded at their birth, which—like lead in gasoline—were introduced without any public recognition of their inevitable toxicity.

Except of course for those with a devoted heir, such as Grace Guggenheim. She was not willing to accept defeat. Instead she set herself the extraordinary task of clearing all of the rights necessary to permit her father's films to be shown. Eight years later, she is largely done. About ten major works remain. Just last year, her father's most famous documentary—*Robert Kennedy Remembered*, made in 1968 in the two months between Kennedy's assassination and the Democratic National Convention, and broadcast only once—was cleared for DVD release through the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center.

I entered the rare book room at the Harvard law library for the first time last fall. At the end of the main reading room, the Elihu Root Room, there are bookcases filled with old books, some of them older even than the Republic. I had come to see just what it would take to have a look at the oldest published works that were available at this, one of America's premier libraries. Not much, it turned out. The librarians directed me to a table. I was free to page through the ancient text, carefully.

Books—physical books, and the copyrighted work that gets carried in them—are an extraordinarily robust cultural artifact. We have access to practically every book ever published anywhere. You do not need to be a Harvard professor to enter the rare book room at the law library. You do not need to touch rare books to read the work those books hold. Older works—before 1923, in the United States—are in the public domain, which means that anyone, including any publisher, can copy and reprint that work without any permission from anyone else. There is no Shakespeare estate that reviews requests for new editions of *Hamlet*. The same is true for every nineteenth-century author in America. These works are freely and widely available, because no law restricts access to these works.

And just about the same is effectively true for any book still under copyright. No doubt, publishers are not free to take the latest Grisham novel and print a knockoff. But through the extraordinary efforts of libraries (and they are Herculean, no doubt) and used bookstores, you can get access to basically anything, and for practically nothing. Your library can get it, and share it with you almost for free. Your used bookstore can find it and sell it to you for less than the cost of a night at the movies.

So notice, then, how different our access to books is from our access to documentary films. After a limited time, almost all published books (but not all: put aside picture books, poetry, and, for reasons that will become obvious, an increasing range of relatively modern work) can be republished and redistributed. No heir of a long-dead author will stop us from accessing her published work (or at least the heart of it—some would say that the cover, the foreword, the index might all have to go). But the vast majority of documentary films from the twentieth century will be forever buried in a lawyer's thicket, inaccessible (legally) because of a set of permissions built into these films at their creation.

Things could have been different. Documentary films could have been created the way books were, with writers using clips the way historians use quotations (that is, with no permission at all). And likewise, books could have been created differently: with each quotation licensed by the original author, with the promise to use the quote only according to the terms of a license. All books could thus be today as documentary films are today—inaccessible. Or all documentary films today could be as almost all books are today—accessible.

But it is the accident of our cultural history, created by lawyers not thinking about, as Duke law professor Jamie Boyle puts it, the "cultural environmental consequences" of their contracts, that we can always legally read, even if we cannot legally watch. In this contrast between books and documentaries, there is a warning about our future. What are the rules that will govern culture for the next hundred years? Are we building an ecology of access that demands a lawyer at every turn of the page? Or have we learned something from the mess of the documentary-film past, and will we create instead an ecology of access that assures copyright owners the incentive they need, while also guaranteeing culture a future?

II.

There has been a rage of attention to the recently revised proposal for a settlement by Google of a lawsuit brought against it by the Authors Guild of America and the Association of American Publishers (AAP). In 2004, Google launched the sort of project that only Internet idealists such as the entrepreneur and archivist Brewster Kahle had imagined: to scan eighteen million books, and make those books accessible on the Internet. How accessible depended upon the type of book. If the book was in the public domain, then Google would give you full access, and even permit you to download a digital copy of the book for free. If the book was presumptively under copyright, then at a minimum Google would grant "snippet access" to the work, meaning you could see a few lines around the words you searched, and then would be given information about where you could buy or borrow the book. But if the work was still in print, then publishers could authorize Google to make available as much of the book (beyond the snippets) as the publishers wanted.

The Authors Guild and AAP claimed that this plan violated copyright law. Their argument was simple and obvious—at least in the autistic sort of way that copyright law thinks about digital technology: when Google scanned the eighteen million books to build its index, it made a "copy" of them. For works still under copyright, the plaintiffs argued, this meant that Google needed permission from the copyright owner before that scan could occur. Never mind that Google scanned the works simply to index them; and never mind that it would never—without permission—distribute whole or even usable copies of the copyrighted works (except to the original libraries as replacements for lost physical copies). According to the plaintiffs, permission was vital, legally. Without it, Google was a pirate.

For 16 percent of the eighteen million books, the plaintiffs' charges were no problem: these were works in the public domain. The law assured Google the free right to copy them. Likewise for the 9 percent that were still in print: for these too, it was relatively easy to identify who to ask before scanning was to happen. Publishers were delighted to assure this simple and cheap marketing for published works (practically all had signed up for the service before Google announced Google Book Search). But for 75 percent of the eighteen million books in our libraries, the rule of the plaintiffs would have been a digital death sentence. For these works—presumptively under copyright but no longer in print—to require permission first is to guarantee invisibility. These works are, practically speaking, orphans. It is effectively impossible—at least at the wholesale level—to secure permission for any use that triggers copyright law.

Google maintained—rightly, in my view—that its "use" of these copyrighted works (copying them so as to index them,

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and then simply enabling a search on that index) was "fair use." That meant it needed no one's permission before it scanned them, so long as its use was sufficiently transformative. But had Google lost the argument—and courts have been known to reach the wrong conclusion in copyright cases—then the company faced crippling liability.

So when it was given a chance to settle, it is no surprise Google took it (though Google insiders insist that fear of liability was not a motive). To its great credit, Google did not back off its claim that its use would have been a "fair use." And even better, it secured from the plaintiffs and for the public a better deal than what "fair use" would have given it and the public. Under the settlement, Google would pay for the right to make up to 20 percent of copyrighted books whose author could not be found available to the public for free; and beyond 20 percent, the public could pay to access the full book, with the funds given over to a new non-profit charged with getting these royalties to the authors who want them. We get one-fifth of all the orphans (or one-fifth of each orphan) for free. And Google got the chance to build an eighteen-million-book digital library.

There is much to praise in this settlement. Lawsuits are expensive and uncertain. They take years to resolve. The deal Google struck guaranteed the public more free access to free content than "fair use" would have done. Twenty percent is better than snippets, and a system that channels money to authors is going to be liked much more than a system that does not. (Not to mention that the deal is elegant and clever in ways that a contracts professor can only envy.)

Yet a wide range of companies, and a band of good souls, have now joined together to attack the Google settlement. Some charge antitrust violations. Some fear that Google will collect information about who reads what—violating reader privacy. And some just love the chance to battle this decade's digital giant (including last decade's digital giant, Microsoft). The main thrust in almost all of these attacks, however, misses the real reason to be concerned about the future that this settlement will build. For the problem here is not just antitrust; it is not just privacy; it is not even the power that this (enormously burdensome) free library will give this already dominant Internet company. Indeed, the problem with the Google settlement is not the settlement. It is the environment for culture that the settlement will cement. For it practically guarantees that we will repeat the cultural-environmental errors of our past, by now turning books into documentary film.

To grasp the problem, you must actually open up the 165-page-long settlement and read a bit of the language. (The first twenty or so pages are definitions, so skim those.) Very quickly, one sees that the Twitter version of this settlement sounds better than the actual document reads. For rather than a relatively simple rule about how much of a book you get for free, and when you have to pay, the actual terms are enormously complex. Whether a book is "free" depends upon the kind of book it is. Journals have a different rule from regular books. Books with pictures have a different rule again.

The deal constructs a world in which control can be exercised at the level of a page, and maybe even a quote. It is a world in which every bit, every published word, could be licensed. It is the opposite of the old slogan about nuclear power: every bit gets metered, because metering is so cheap. We begin to sell access to knowledge the way we sell access to a movie theater, or a candy store, or a baseball stadium. We create not digital libraries, but digital bookstores: a Barnes & Noble without the Starbucks.

I had been thinking about this issue as a theoretical matter for some time. But then, a few months ago, it hit me quite directly. My wife had just given birth to our third child. On the morning of the child's third day, doctors were worried about jaundice. By the evening, the child had fallen into a state of severe lethargy. We called the doctor. He wanted a report in two hours. If she did not improve, he wanted her taken to the emergency room. By midnight she had not improved, and so I bundled her into the car seat and raced to nearby Children's Hospital.

As I sat waiting for the doctor, I began reading an article I had found through Google about jaundice and its dangers. Fortunately, the piece was published by the American Family Physician, which makes its articles available freely on the Internet. And so with an increasing feeling of panic, I read about the condition—hyperbilirubinemia—that the doctor feared our child had developed.

I reached a critical part of the article. It referred to a table. I turned the page to see the table. The table was missing. In its place was a notice: "The rightsholder did not grant rights to reproduce this item in electronic media." No one had licensed the table for free distribution. Distribution was thus blocked. "Have your lawyer call my lawyer," the article seemingly urged. "We'll work something out."

I sat in that waiting room chair staring in disbelief. It was a relief of sorts, to fear for the future of our culture rather than the future of my daughter. But I was astonished. I could not believe that we were this far down the path to insanity already. And that experience spurs me to ask some urgent questions. (The kid is fine, by the way.) Before we continue any further down this culturally asphyxiating road, can we think about it a little more? Before we release a gaggle of lawyers to police every quotation appearing in any book, can we stop for a moment to consider whether this way of organizing access to culture makes sense? Does this complexity get us something we would not get under the older system? Does this innovation in obsessive control produce any new understanding? Is it really progress?

Whatever your view of it, notice first just how different this future promises to be. In real libraries, in real space, access is not metered at the level of the page (or the image on the page). Access is metered at the level of books (or magazines, or CDs, or DVDs). You get to browse through the whole of the library, for free. You get to check out the books you want to read, for free. The real-space library is a den protected from the metering of the market. It is of course created within a market; but like kids in a playroom, we let the life inside the library ignore the market outside.

This freedom gave us something real. It gave us the freedom to research, regardless of our wealth; the freedom to read, widely and technically, beyond our means. It was a way to assure that all of our culture was available and reachable—not just that part that happens to be profitable to stock. It is a guarantee that we have the opportunity to learn about our past, even if we lack the will to do so. The architecture of access that we have in real space created an important and valuable balance between the part of culture that is effectively and meaningfully regulated by copyright and the part of culture that is not. The world of our real-space past was a world in which copyright intruded only rarely, and when it did, its relationship to the objectives of copyright was relatively clear.

We forget all this today. With all the attention that copyright law gets, we forget that there was a time when it just didn't matter that much to the way ordinary people accessed and used culture. I don't

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mean that it did not matter to authors and publishers. Of course it did. I mean that it did not matter to most people as they went about their life using, enjoying, building upon, and critiquing culture. As Michigan law professor Jessica Litman put it:

> At the turn of the century, U.S. copyright law was technical, inconsistent, and difficult to understand, but it didn't apply to very many people or very many things. If one were an author or publisher of books, maps, charts, paintings, sculpture, photographs or sheet music, a playwright or producer of plays, or a printer, the copyright law bore on one's business. Booksellers, piano-roll and phonograph record publishers, motion picture producers, musicians, scholars, members of Congress, and ordinary consumers could go about their business without ever encountering a copyright problem.
>
> Ninety years later, U.S. copyright law is even more technical, inconsistent and difficult to understand—but more importantly, it touches everyone and everything. In the intervening years, copyright has reached out to embrace much of the paraphernalia of modern society. The current copyright statute weighs in at 142 pages. Technology, heedless of law, has developed modes that insert multiple acts of reproduction and transmission—potentially actionable events under the copyright statute—into commonplace daily transactions. Most of us can no longer spend even an hour without colliding with the copyright law.

Copyright did not even matter much, as a practical matter, to most authors. If you are lucky as an author, your work has two vibrant lives. In its first life, the exclusive right of copyright is relevant. In its second life, it is not. Copyright is relevant in the first because, while a work is in print, the publisher needs (or so publishers believe) the exclusive right to publish it. But once the work passes out of print, it has become, from the author's perspective at least, essentially free. To be sure, used bookstores make money (not much) if they sell a copy of the book, and libraries charge fees to move books from one part of the country to another. But when a used book gets sold, the author gets nothing, and when a patron in a library (in America) checks out a book, the author also gets nothing. The commercial activity of used bookstores and the non-commercial activity of libraries all happens without the permission of an author (or her lawyer), and without any emolument to an author, because none of the activities involved in selling a used book, or in lending a book in a library, triggers the law of copyright. No copy is made. No new work is derived. No performance is done in public. None of the exclusive rights of copyright reach these commercial and non-commercial uses. So the holders of that exclusive right—sometimes authors—get nothing.

Authors may not be terribly happy about this. I have heard writers in other countries brag about the $2.50 they receive each year from the tax that is imposed on libraries whenever they let people read books for free. But whether authors are happy or not, it is critical to recognize that the free access that this world created was an essential part of how we passed our culture along. When you send your children to a library to write a research paper, you do not want them to have access to just 20 percent of each book they need to read. You want them to be able to read all of the book. And you do not want them to read just the books they think they would be willing to pay to access. You want them to browse: to explore, to wonder, to ask questions—the way, for example, people explore and wonder and ask questions using Google or Wikipedia. We had a culture where an enormous chunk of cultural life was proliferated and shared without most of us ever calling a copyright lawyer. Whether authors (or more likely, publishers) liked it or not, that was our fortunate past.

We are about to change that past, radically. And the premise for that change is an accidental feature of the architecture of copyright law: that it regulates *copies*. In the physical world, this architecture means that the law regulates a small set of the possible uses of a copyrighted work. In the digital world, this architecture means that the law regulates everything. For every single use of creative work in digital space makes a copy. Thus—the lawyer insists—every single use must in some sense be licensed. Even the scanning of a book for the purpose of generating an index—the action at the core of the Google book case—triggers the law of copyright, because that scanning, again, produces a copy.

And what this means, or so I fear, is that we are about to transform books into documentary films. The legal structure that we now contemplate for the accessing of books is even more complex than the legal structure that we have in place for the accessing of films. Or more simply still: we are about to make every access to our culture a legally regulated event, rich in its demand for lawyers and licenses, certain to burden even relatively popular work. Or again: we are about to make a catastrophic cultural mistake.

III.

How might we do better? What would a solution to this mess look like, a solution that would not bury our culture in a morass of legal and technical code? The core problem here is not one of Google's creation. It is not a problem that we should expect Google, or any other private company, to solve. Indeed, Google has gone a great distance in the settlement to mitigate the problems that the law (given digital technology) imports: the settlement has a special deal for libraries and universities, and it has the potential to offer a special deal for researchers. Google and the plaintiffs have tried to grant special favors of access, no doubt to avoid precisely the kind of concern I am raising here. And no doubt the settlement as a whole is an experiment that could teach us a great deal about how culture is demanded, and what access we need to secure.

But we cannot rely upon special favors granted by private companies (and quasi-monopoly collecting societies) to define our access to culture, even if the favors are generous, at least at the start. Instead our focus should be on the underlying quandary that gives rise to the need for this elaborate scheme to regulate access to culture. However clever the settlement, however elegant the technology, we should keep Peter Drucker's words clear in our head: "There is nothing

Tea

Tonight I'm fruit and clove. I'm bergamot.
I drop a teabag in the cup and boil
the kettle until it sings. As if on cue,
a part of me remembers how to brew
the darker things—those years I was a pot
of smoky leaves scented with orange oil.
Truth is, I don't remember much of school,
the crushed-up taste of it. I was a drink
forgotten on the table, left to cool.
I was a rusted tin marked childhood.
I don't remember trying to be good
or bad, but only that I used to sink
in water and wait for something to unfurl,
the scent of summer in the jasmine pearl.

JEHANNE DUBROW

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so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

The problem that we are confronting is the result of a law that has been rendered hopelessly out-of-date by new technologies. The solution is a re-crafting of that law to achieve its estimable objective—incentives to authors—without becoming a wholly destructive burden to culture. The details of such a re-crafting are impossible to sketch just yet. We have all wasted too much time waging the copyright wars to know enough what a sensible peace would look like. Still, the contours of some first steps are clear enough. There are two obvious changes that the law should make, plus a third, which, though requiring a difficult choice of values, the law will have to confront.

The first is to make this property system more efficient. Governments establish property systems. The minimal obligation on a government is that it make its system efficient. Copyright is a property system established by the federal government. Yet that government has failed in its minimal obligation toward this property system. Copyright is among the least efficient property systems known to man. It is practically impossible—that is, without project-defeating costs—to identify who owns what for the vast majority of work regulated by our copyright system.

The Google settlement tries to solve this problem in part. The regime that it would establish calls for the creation of a voluntary copyright registry. But as there is no obligation on anyone to participate in this registry, there is no way to be certain about who owns what. A better solution would be to shift to the copyright owners some of the burden of keeping the copyright system up to date, by establishing an absolute obligation to register their work, at least after a limited time. Thus, for example, five years after a work is published, a domestic copyright owner should be required to maintain her copyright by registering the work. Failure to register would mean that the work would pass into the public domain. Successful registration would mean a simple way to identify who owned what. (For complicated reasons having to do with international obligations, this requirement could only apply to domestic copyright owners. But the same rule could be adopted by every nation within this international regime.)

The government should not run these registries. They are the sort of thing that the Googles and Microsofts of the world should do. Rather, the government should establish the minimal protocols for these registries, and permit registrars to compete to service that registry. As with the domain name system for the Internet (and the companies that sell TNR.com and the like), these competing registrars would keep the cost low, and have a constant incentive to innovate to make the value they add better than their competitors.

This maintenance requirement should apply to books alone—for now. There are different, and enormously complicated, problems with other forms of creative work, photographs in particular, especially after a generation of law telling creators that they need do nothing to secure complete protection for their work. But the objective should be to include these other works as soon as it is feasible, so that this first and most basic obligation of a property system could be met: that it tell the world who owns what.

The second obvious change is to build legal-thicket weed whackers. The vast majority of the problems that we now face in preserving and securing access to our cultural past are caused by the failure of the past to anticipate the radical potential of technology in the future. The past can be forgiven for this. Even the designers of the Internet did not foresee its size or its significance. But our response to this complexity should not be simply to suffer through. The thicket of legal obligations that buries film, music, and every other form of creative work (save books) should be remade using a rule that gives current owners the ability to secure value for those rights, but through a clearinghouse that would shift us away from a world of endless negotiation to a world where simple property rules function simply.

The details of this system are beyond the scope of an essay, but the basic idea is simple enough to sketch. For any compiled work—like a film, or a recording—more than fourteen years old (a nod to our Framers' copyright term), the law should secure an absolute right to preserve the work without burden to the current owner. That means that Grace Guggenheim and others like her—as well as film archives and film studios—should be free to preserve film without worrying about rights clearance of any sort. Whether copying happens or not, the act of preservation should be free of legal restriction.

Beyond preservation, however, the rule will have to be more complex. The law should enable a simple way for the compiled work to clear perpetual rights to that work alone, so that it can be made available, even commercially, forever. And this requires progress in how we think about copyright. It requires giving up the idea that the elements in a compiled work—the music in a film, for example—have a continuing power to block access to, or distribution of, that work. Once a work is made, rather, we need to recognize that it has its own claim within our culture. And so long as the necessary permissions to make the work were secured originally, then at some point in the future (again, say fourteen years after its creation), the parts lose the power to control the whole.

No doubt, a composer has the right to decide whether her song appears in J. J. Abrams's next film. But we need to move away from a system in which that composer also has the right to block the distribution of Abrams's film thirty years after it was made. Such a system of rights is wildly too complex, and it serves no public good, and the law should not support it. Instead, after some period, the copyright owner of the compiled work needs the simple ability to secure the right to distribute the original work in whatever platform for distribution then makes sense.

Of course, the Constitution limits the ability of Congress to "sport away vested rights." But that limit is itself limited. Congress cannot simply declare that rights in creative work do not exist anymore. Yet there is a long tradition in property law recognizing the right of governments to establish simple mechanisms for clearing rights. Thus a rule that permitted copyright owners of film—for example, to opt into a regime that reserved 20 percent of royalties for a collecting rights society to distribute to affected rights holders—would be one system that would cut through the present thicket while permitting compensation to the rights holders, who in theory at least are entitled to revenues.

But why should copyright owners not be permitted to agree to whatever complicated system of access they want? It's their property, isn't it? Here we come back to Property 101. The law has always set limits on the freedom of property owners to allocate their property as they want. Families in Britain wanted to control how estates passed down the family line. At a certain point, their wants became way too complicated. The response was rules—such as the Rule Against Perpetuities—designed to enhance the efficiency of the market by limiting the freedom of property owners to place conditions on their property, thus making

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it possible for property to move more simply. That is precisely the impulse I wish to recommend here: that we limit the freedom of lawyers to craft infinitely complicated agreements governing culture, so that access to our culture can be preserved.

THE THIRD CHANGE is the most difficult, since it involves not just old work, but also new work—and not just the battles of lawyers, but decisions about how culture gets created. Yet this question, too, must soon be resolved.

The law of copyright is shot through with balances struck to protect markets and to limit markets. Two hundred years of legislation shows a constant effort to identify and to secure the places where commercial values should reign and the places where they should be constrained. Sometimes that limit was an unavoidable by-product of the technology of copyrighted works. No one planned that reading a book would be free of copyright; it just couldn't, in the physical world at least, be any different. Sometimes that limit was the express intention of Congress—as in the explicitly favorable terms granted to public broadcasting, for example.

We need a renewed effort to strike this balance through interests that recognize the good in both sides. It would be a mistake to destroy new markets by eliminating copyright protection where it would do good. It would also be a mistake to assume that all access to culture should be governed by markets, regardless of the effect it has on access to our past. In the most abstract sense, we need to decide what kinds of access should be free. And we need to craft the law to assure that freedom.

Some of this might be thought of as simple translation. Public radio was granted significant benefits under the Copyright Act of 1976, securing the right to use music, for example, under extremely favorable terms. But that right does not on its face extend to the new forms of Internet distribution that increasingly define how we access culture. The simplest response would be to update these earlier freedoms to take account of new media. At a minimum, we could translate the regime that existed into this new technological environment.

But translation presumes that the original meaning was intended. Sometimes it was not. Maybe the free access of libraries was planned, a decision of policy makers, or maybe it was just the unavoidable by-product of the limits of the law in an inefficient environment for enforcing the law. Though the original meaning is ambiguous, the ambiguity was latent. But now that it has been made manifest, we need to decide how far free access should reach.

I have no clear view. I only know that the two extremes that are before us would, each of them, if operating alone, be awful for our culture. The one extreme, pushed by copyright abolitionists, that forces free access on every form of culture, would shrink the range and the diversity of culture. I am against abolitionism. And I see no reason to support the other extreme either—pushed by the content industry—that seeks to license every single use of culture, in whatever context. That extreme would radically shrink access to our past.

Instead we need an approach that recognizes the errors in both extremes, and that crafts the balance that any culture needs: incentives to support a diverse range of creativity, with an assurance that the creativity inspired remains for generations to access and understand. This may be too much to ask. The idea of balanced public policy in this area will strike many as oxymoronic. It is thus no wonder, perhaps, that the likes of Google sought progress not through better legislation, but through a clever kludge, enabled by genius technologists. But this is too important a matter to be left to private enterprises and private deals. Private deals and outdated law are what got us into this mess. Whether or not a sensible public policy is possible, it is urgently needed. ◆

William Deresiewicz
CARDED

THE ORIGINAL OF LAURA
By Vladimir Nabokov
Edited by Dmitri Nabokov
(Knopf, 304 pp., $35)

SO THIS IS WHAT we've all been waiting for? The last, lost work of the great master, all but complete, so rumor had it, at the time of his death, sequestered for decades in a Swiss vault, "brilliant, original, and potentially totally radical," according to his son and heir, "the most concentrated distillation of [my father's] creativity"—and all that it amounts to, we now learn, is a handful of crumbs, a bit of lint, a few coins. Well, print it in a scholarly journal, sell it to *The New Yorker*, put it in a catchall collection of unpublished work. I was not for burning, as Nabokov decreed, but after dithering for two decades, after Ron Rosenbaum's Web-based worldwide plebiscite, after all the prefatory gestures of a small-time conjurer building up to the culminating bunny, is this really what Dmitri Nabokov proposes to foist on us? Scarcely thirty pages worth of text, packaged into a brick of a book (curb weight 2.4 pounds) and modestly priced at, ahem, thirty-five bucks.

It's a sham, a scam. I don't think Dmitri did it for the money—*Lolita*'s child must be rolling in it. But I do think Knopf did, and they must have drafted a platoon of cosmetologists to gussy up this pig. Lipstick? Lipstick, rouge, high heels, falsies, and a little black cocktail dress. Nabokov worked on index cards, and *The Original of Laura* amounted, at his death, to 138 of them. But rather than simply printing the texts of the cards one after another, or even printing each one on a separate page, Knopf has put the whole thing on heavy, stiff card stock and given us a facsimile of each and every card, its handwritten contents typeset underneath. And on the reverse of each page, a facsimile of the back of the card, almost invariably blank or consisting of nothing more than a large "X" in pencil strokes. Hence the 304 pages, the 2.4 pounds, the thirty-five bucks.

But wait, there's more. The cards are perforated and, as Dmitri says in a note, "can be removed and rearranged, as the author likely did when he was writing the novel." I'll get back to the second half of that statement, a claim both strategic and semi-dubious (not to mention ungrammatical). The first breaks new ground in editorial chutzpah, inviting us to play a kind of *Nabokov: Rock Band*—the novel as theme park. One can only imagine what dear old dad—the ultimate artistic control freak, not to mention one of the all-time snobs—would have thought of the idea of letting his readers re-arrange his scraps and chapters at will.

The design offers other distractions from the volume's meager content. Mock perforations in snazzy red, typographical hijinks, little doodads strewn about. The images of two of the index cards re-

William Deresiewicz is writing a book about Jane Austen.

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produced on the covers, one of them so positioned that the title appears on the spine in Nabokov's own hand. An author photo, twice reproduced, that might have been thought the better of. Instead of the familiar image from the backs of the later novels—head tilted, cheek fisted, forehead furrows cocked, an expression of sardonic impatience as if bracing for the next stupid question—this one gives the writer face-on and near to bald, his look of defensive hostility somewhat undermined by a buxom set of jowls imperfectly hidden by a strategic hand at the chin, the whole producing an impression both babyish and batrachian, a Slavic Truman Capote.

Most prominently of all—it is the first thing we see—a graphic gimmick on the dust jacket: the words slowly fade from left to right, white letters disappearing into black background. The gesture has multiple meanings, some obvious, some revealing themselves only in retrospect. The book itself fades to black, its words incomplete. Nabokov's life, as he wrote it, likewise evanesced. And within the novel, a different kind of effacement. The story has three strands: Flora, a femme fatale; her husband, Philip Wild, a fat and famous neurologist; her lover, or one of them, the author of a novel named *Laura* or *My Laura* (the pronoun seems to have been a late addition on Nabokov's part), based on Flora's life. Flora is thus the "original of Laura," with all the metaphysical, metafictional involutions that the idea entails. But Wild also has a story—indeed, has a book, the record of his experiments in self-erasure, in willed ecstatic suicide. The method is mental: he imagines a vertical chalk line, standing for his body, then slowly, starting at the bottom—the toes, the feet—begins to rub it out, with "more than masturbatory joy," by a kind of concentration or meditation. Always careful to restore what's been erased before breaking his trance—the one time he doesn't he finds that his toes start to crumble off—Wild intuits nonetheless the possibility of blissful self-extinction.

Hence the third meaning of the jacket's design: the letters mimic Wild's chalk-stroke effigy, on its way to deletion. But there is a further implication, central to Dmitri's claims about the novel, which, though never completely spelled out, are insistently insinuated, most clearly in a curious phrase that also appears on the jacket (though nowhere in the volume proper). At the bottom, in small letters, this: "A novel in fragments." Not "fragments of a novel," which is what the volume clearly is: two numbered chapters in fair copy; three more in somewhat less finished condition; a few other pieces, labeled but not numbered, in various states of construction; and about a dozen and a half miscellaneous singleton cards—notes, scribbles, superseded drafts, scraps of research. This mess, Dmitri would have us believe, adds up to a novel—or, as his introduction puts it, all but "the last few card lengths needed to finish at least a complete draft."

The claim, in other words, is that Nabokov wanted the final product to look more or less like this—that he planned to create a fragmentary work, a thing of gaps and interruptions, false starts and aborted scenes, broken chapters and missing words. A postmodern work, we are to understand, conceived beneath the sign of postmodernism's holiest ideas: aporia, aphasia, deferral, displacement, deconstruction. And all, implicitly, so as to embody the theme of Wild's experiments and create a novel that exhibits itself in the process of erasure, crumbling away as it proceeds, fading out like the letters on the jacket. Were this hypothesis correct, *The Original of Laura* might not be a "masterpiece," as Dmitri wants us to think, or even "the most concentrated distillation" of his father's creativity, but it certainly would be "unprecedented in structure and style," a "potentially totally radical book, in the literary sense very different from the rest of his oeuvre."

Which is, of course, the best reason not to believe a word of it. Nabokov, in theme, had always indeed been what is called a postmodernist, performing Olympianly gymnastic variations on ideas of authorial disappearance, epistemic instability, the inaccessibility of origins, and endless, nameless others. But he was never anything other than a classicist in the perfection of finish that he gave to his work. *Pale Fire* may yoke together a foreward, a poem, a commentary, and an index, all warring like the principalities of a madman's soul, but the terms of their struggle are worked out to the last comma. The man built racing machines. To think that he would hand us a bucket of parts—and even more, leave us to fumble around with their order, the implication of Dmitri's invitation to re-arrangement (deconstruct this book!)—is to commit an outrage against the spirit of his art.

But that's Dmitri's story, and he's sticking to it. Not content to nudge us with introductory nods and typographical winks, he stacks the deck of interpretation by playing one particular index card as if it were his ace of spades—and playing it, like a crooked dealer, again and again—when it is, in fact, nothing more than a joker. The card consists of a vertical list of synonyms:

efface
expunge
erase
delete
rub out
[xxxxxxx xxxxx]
wipe out
obliterate

"Efface" is circled; the x's here represent a phrase that has been blotted out with pencil strokes (as have many words throughout the volume). Dmitri prints the card last, as if it were the novel's final note—even a flourish of defiance, as its author sails into the great beyond; he prints it first, facing the copyright page and before the table of contents, as if it were its governing conceit; he prints it on the cover (not the jacket), as if it were a kind of alternative title.

It is none of these. It is a piece of scrap. The lines on the card form a grid, like graph paper. There are only two similar cards in the entire set of 138, and both are among the miscellaneous singletons. One appears to be the first draft of a single sentence—the spelling and punctuation are careless—not immediately connected to any other card. The other is manifestly scrap, a set of phrases, heavily blotted and crossed out, that appear in finished form on a different card (as Dmitri acknowledges in a footnote). And this card and Dmitri's trump also share a characteristic that none of the others do. They are positioned vertically, the writing running the short way—which means that they cannot be stacked with the other cards and thus, that Nabokov could not possibly have intended to include them in the final manuscript, but only grabbed them for a quick jot. In fact, "efface expunge…" is written at a slant, exactly as if the words had been dashed off—as is the case on only one other card, and that, too, a clear piece of scrap.

The evidence, then, is overwhelming. Dmitri has tried to cook his books with nothing more than the remains of a brainstorming session. Nabokov was apparently trying to come up with a list of alternative expressions for what is, of course, a thematically central idea, and

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"efface" seems to have won out for whatever his purposes were at the moment, as signaled by the fact that it is circled. (Elsewhere he uses versions of a number of the other words, as well as "dissolve," "destroy," "annihilate," and, with a nice pun, "eraze.") The whole thing is a red herring, and a very fishy one at that.

Does even Dmitri believe his theory? It is hard to say. The man comes across, in the introduction and other prefatory material, as a thoroughgoing crank: obsessive, possessive, touchily defensive about his father's work yet simultaneously willing to bend his words wherever his own operatic psychodrama needs them to reach. English had become for Nabokov, says the son raised by Russian parents in the United States, "a new 'softest of tongues' "—the very phrase with which his exiled father had evoked his original language in elegiac contradistinction to his adopted one, words now expropriated by Dmitri to serve the very opposite meaning. There are whiffs here of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Nabokov's first English novel, with its struggles over language and patrimony, Russian and English, but the inevitable analogy is Kinbote, *Pale Fire*'s lunatic editor-narrator, wrenching the eighty index cards of John Shade's eponymous poem into the shape of his needful fantasies. Indeed, Dmitri's failure to mention that specter, if only to exorcise him—or at least to give himself a shot at not resembling him quite so thoroughly—suggests a fatal lack of self-awareness.

The son has apparently arrogated the full measure of his father's superciliousness, perhaps to compensate for the fact that he inherited so little of his verbal ability. The introduction is graced with phrases such as "lesser minds," "half-literate journalists," "individuals with limited imagination," "some asinine electronic biography," "the trashy tropics of Cancer and Capricorn," and, the true Nabokovian note, "fashionable morons," but also with gems such as this: "an embryonic masterpiece whose pockets of genius were beginning to pupate here and there"—an entomologically addled metaphor to which his father would never have allowed himself to give birth. Like others admitted to the highest artistic circles on the basis of something other than talent, Dmitri seems a special kind of fool, as blind as he is vain. "I did a great deal of thinking," he says of the time that followed his mother's death, when he inherited the task of deciding the manuscript's fate, and we can appreciate how strange the experience must have been.

A mind like that can convince itself of anything. Still, there are reasons to believe he knows better. A couple of years ago, Ron Rosenbaum reported in *The New York Observer* that Dmitri told him that "the manuscript consists of approximately fifty index cards," which corresponds to the length, fifty-four cards, of the five numbered chapters. Rosenbaum also noted, however, that Dmitri had earlier said that "the text amounts to some thirty conventional manuscript pages"—a contradiction, though Rosenbaum could not have known it at the time. Nabokov's fullest cards contain no more than eighty or ninety words. Fifty-four of these would make about fifteen manuscript pages; thirty pages, as we noted, is more like the length of the whole set of 138. So Dmitri seems to have been vacillating as to whether the other eighty-four were part of the work and was thus presumably still trying to persuade himself of the "novel in fragments" theory. (This may also be the place to note that thirty manuscript pages—fragmentary, fair, or final—does not a novel remotely make. Nabokov never published one less than at least three times that long. *The Original of Laura* would have to be a novel in miniature, too.)

There are other contradictions of which Dmitri must be aware. In the second volume of his authoritative biography, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, Brian Boyd reports the following intriguing facts. In February 1976, nearly a year and a half before his death, Nabokov wrote in his diary: "New novel more or less completed and copied fifty-four cards. In four batches from different parts of the novel. Plus notes and drafts." This clearly does not mean that he had finished the novel, only that he had completed four sections totaling fifty-four cards—which may or may not correspond to the 54 cards of the five numbered chapters. In April, he wrote, "transcribed in final form 50 cards=5000 words"—again, perhaps our fifty-four, though the word count would be a bit high, or fifty of them, or perhaps our fifty-four condensed to fifty.

In any case, here's where things get really interesting. That same week in April, Nabokov noted that he was composing at the rate of five or six cards a day, and he informed his publisher, a couple of weeks later, that he had passed the hundred-printed-page mark. Arithmetic optimism being one of the great lubricants of the writer-editor relationship, we need not take the last number too literally, but it is reasonable to assume that he had something close to that much material by then. (It is also perfectly clear that he expected the final product to be at least that long—in other words, a good four times as long as what we have—and probably a good deal longer.) And nearly a year later, in February 1977, he was speaking to friends "as if his new novel was almost completed." Boyd notes throughout his account of the development of *The Original of Laura* that Nabokov worked his novels out in his head before committing them to paper, so "completed" here could mean only mentally. Still, we are left with the fact that, as early as April 1976, Nabokov already seems to have had far more material than our entire volume represents. And yet we know that he continued to work on the novel, and work on it vigorously, for almost another year.

So what is going on? I don't think Dmitri is hiding anything, but I do believe it is possible that his father really did get within "the last few card lengths needed to finish at least a complete draft" and for unknown reasons the great bulk of the material was lost—deliberately destroyed, by who knows whom, or tragically misplaced. All we can say for sure is that *The Original of Laura* that we have is not remotely the one that Boyd's best researches led us to expect. Perhaps Dmitri, when he finally managed to bring himself to open the box that contained the manuscript in the wake of his mother's death (he speaks of needing "to traverse a stifling barrier of pain before touching the cards"), felt a similar sense of dismay, only incomparably more devastating than the rest of us could possibly experience, and perhaps the "fragments" theory represents an attempt, like the absurd claims about the manuscript's merit—"concentrated distillation," "potentially totally radical," "embryonic masterpiece"—to juggle away his grief. Kinbote's wish-fulfillments also serve to stifle pain.

The problem, however, is not what Dmitri believes. The problem is that there are likely to be plenty of readers who will be only too happy to go along with him. Rosenbaum himself, in a piece published in *Slate* last September—Knopf, priming the publicity pump, offered a sneak peek at the finished volume—inadvertently suggested why:

> If Dan Brown's latest is *The Lost Symbol*, you might say Nabokov's *Laura* is *The Last Symbols*: his final written words, the draft he wanted burned if he died before completing it. . . . The one—and this is what made it so seductive, an object of worldwide fascination

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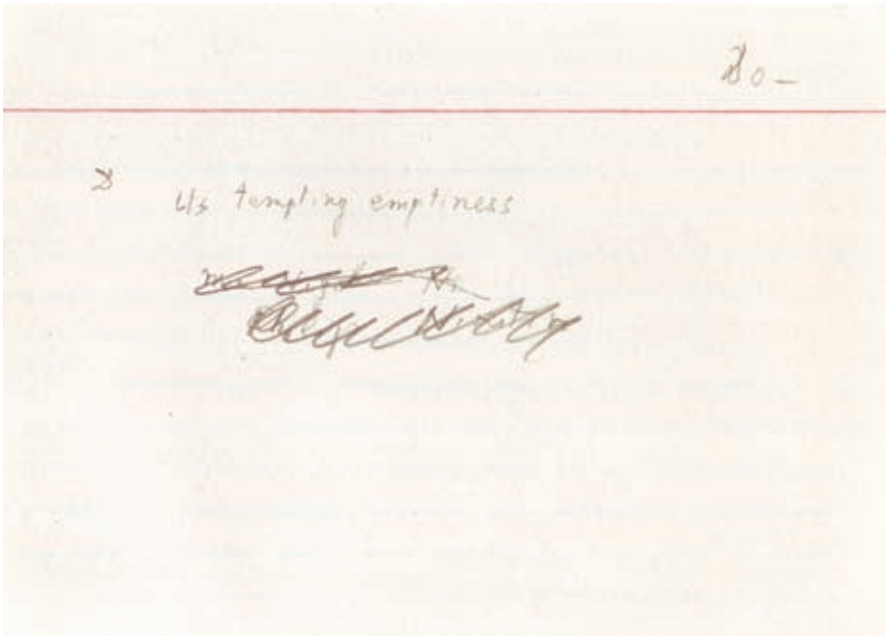
among littérateurs—that might contain a clue or clues, a code, for all we knew, that would offer new perspective on the often cryptic prose of past Nabokov masterpieces.

Rosenbaum himself is too intelligent to buy into the notion of literary skeleton keys. "I don't believe," he hastened to add, "that literature is something to be decoded in some Rosetta Stone-like fashion." But even as clear-sighted a reader as Rosenbaum apparently allowed himself to be blinded, quite literally, by the prospect of esoteric revelations. "I spent a lot of time trying to make anything out," he reported in reference to Nabokov's many deletions (the erasures, cross-outs, and spiraling strokes that mark almost every card):



"its tempting emptiness"

and I swear the only effacement I may have deciphered occurs in the faint shadow of the erased smudge on the index card on Page 233. It's not in Dmitri's transcript, and V.N. himself obviously decided he didn't want it there (at the time, anyway), but I thought I could make out two words in the deletion the transcript may have missed: "the coded."

Well, the phrase is certainly there, Nabokov's spirals (not erasures) being unusually faint at that point. But so, on that very card, are at least a few other legible deletions: a "tea," a "made," a couple more "the's." And so, on other cards, are any number of additional ones: "as Tony says" on page 225, "completely" on 213, "the corner of" on 183—and those are only the first ones we arrive at working backwards from 233. The suspicion strongly arises that Rosenbaum's numinous phrase was the only one he saw because it is the only one he wanted to see. And even if he again went on to downplay its significance ("I just couldn't avoid noting it"), others won't so readily forebear from reading this and other "clues." *Slate*, knowing a good hook when it sees one, titled Rosenbaum's report "The Nabokov Code."

The hunting of Rosetta Stones is one of the great vices of the reading mind. The interpretation of secular texts descends from the exposition of sacred ones, and inherits its feelings and ways. There are the Talmudists, the exegetes, who seek the slow unfolding of wisdom in the endless play of commentary, and then there are the Kabbalists, the mystics, who hope by abstruse means (catching a glimpse around the corner of a sentence, tracing a mark along the underside of a phrase) to startle out a final esoteric answer to the questions of existence—to uncover, as it were, the secret name of God.

Modern literature in general and Nabokov in particular are especially dangerous places to which to carry such expectations. It was modernism itself, after the collapse of traditional systems of explanation, that invented the "religion of art" by claiming the sacerdotal functions of spiritual and moral instruction. ("The priest departs," said Whitman, "the divine literatus comes.") The idea did indeed often carry a mystical charge—among the Symbolists, for example, with their doctrine of the unpronounceability of truth, their murky hieratic idealism. But modern fiction never took the notion of transcendental disclosure as anything other than an object of play. Joyce, creating a kind of parody Bible in *Ulysses*, teases us with recondite conundrums—"the word known to all men," the man in the macintosh—as if daring us to believe that such enigmas somehow hold the key to "everything," whatever that might mean (and spawning a legion of Joycean Kabbalists who make the mistake of taking him seriously). Nabokov does the same throughout his work, leading us up to moments of apparent revelation—in dreams, in puzzles, in epiphanies—only to make them end in metaphysical pratfalls, the gem of truth slipping out of our fingers like a diamond bouncing down a kitchen drain. V., in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, dreams that his dying brother is about to disclose the secret of existence, only to be thwarted from reaching him in time by a nightmare of practical frustrations. John Shade, searching for proof of the afterlife in the published account of a near-death experience, falls victim to a misprint.

As these examples suggest, Nabokov's novels offer unusual temptations to the code-seeker. There is really only one mystery that people finally care about: the possibility of life after death. The question preoccupied Nabokov as well. Many of his works, including most of his later novels—*The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, "The Vane Sisters," *Pale Fire*, *Transparent Things*, *Look at the Harlequins!*—adumbrate or speculate about some form of ghostly survival. For Nabokov, death was an accident, an interruption, and this life merely a "kindergarten" compared to what comes next. Or so he wanted to believe. He recognized, of course—this is one of the meanings of Shade's disappointment—that one can never really know, at least not on this side of the grave. But combine that preoccupation with the allusive, elusive nature of his art, his delight in narrative riddles and traps; add a lost "final" work (note the slippage in the word's meaning, from accidentally last to intentionally definitive), one whose very incompleteness opens the barn door of speculation; factor in the ancient superstition of deathbed prophecy (the dying, approaching the abyss, catch a glimpse over the brink)—and you have the makings of a great deal of nonsense.

Needless to say, *The Original of Laura* does not contain "the code" of cosmic truth. Does it meet Rosenbaum's (and surely others') more modest, though still

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monumental, hope that it reveal at least Nabokov's secrets, constitute "the author's last reflections on the dazzling corpus that came before," "the lens through which . . . we might retrospectively refocus our vision of Nabokov's art"? It would be awfully surprising if it did. Nabokov, born in 1899, had been slowing down ever since the twin peaks of *Lolita* in 1955 and *Pale Fire* in 1962. Even *Ada* (1969), conceived on the scale of a magnum opus but plaqued by longueurs and other symptoms of enfeeblement, falls below the highest mark. *Transparent Things* (1972) is taut but thin. *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) is almost flatulent, an apt farewell.

The odds that Nabokov would produce another masterpiece at that point in his life, let alone a definitive one, were long. Besides, what would "last reflections" even mean, beyond what Nabokov had already provided in *Look at the Harlequins!*, that pseudo-autobiography? Do novelists "reflect" in novels, or novels reflect on one another? A career is not a lecture series, with a scheduled ending and a predetermined point to make. After well over two dozen books, should we really expect that one more would revolutionize our understanding of an entire corpus, disclose some definitive interpretive scheme? The idea is merely a secularized version of the faith in deathbed prophecy, and equally null.

Here is what *The Original of Laura*, as we have it, actually is: the beginning of what might have been a very interesting piece of work. The characters and premises are too briefly sketched to say more than this, though far from being unprecedented, the novel's props and themes are as familiar as the faces at Thanksgiving dinner. The title suggests *Lolita*, of course, for that figure, too, had a template, the teenage lover whom Humbert refers to as Annabel Leigh. (Nabokov, completing the trans-Atlantic poetic acrostic, drops an "Aurora Lee" into *The Original of Laura* as Flora's husband's lost teenage love and, in that respect, her own original.) Flora, deflowered in a bower, has her first sexual experience, like Humbert, on the Riviera, a couple of years after her own Lolita-like tussle—in a Parisian flat, another stock Nabokovian setting—with a gentleman lodger called Hubert H. Hubert (whose name seems to cross his famous predecessor with a certain ill-starred American politician who was much in the news circa 1976).

But Nabokov plays some tricks on us. Hubert, despite what we are seduced to believe, is no pedophile, just a sad old man—far more Pnin than Humbert—who's lost his family. He really is in love with his landlady, who reminds him of his wife, rather than with her daughter, a copy of his own, and he really does treat Flora "with a father's sudden concern." As always, Nabokov asks us to search for emotional complexities beneath the conventional moral surface, even when the conventions are drawn from his own fiction.

As for Flora, she is far, at fourteen, from the starry-eyed lover that Humbert was around the same time and place. She refuses to let her ballboy boyfriend kiss her on the mouth, "observe[s] with quite interest" as he struggles with the inaugural condom, then dumps him when, tired out and "stinking more than usual" after a hard day's work, he suggests a movie in lieu of their nightly caresses. "Stinking more than usual," of course, is Flora's phrase. Nabokov's powers of implication are matched, as always, by the perfect tact with which he allows them to operate. We have already seen, in the briefest of glances, "a young man with a mackintosh over his white pajamas" wringing his hands in an alley by the house that Flora later shares with her husband, and needed a moment to identify him as the lover she had just dismissed, forever, by phone.

Wild, the husband, is not himself what he first appears. The novel opens at a party, with Flora, in mid-conversation, conjuring the image of a domestic brute. Quickly discerning the state of her morals—she issues a kind of casting call to the male members of the assembly—and remembering the violent and even murderous jealousy of Nabokovian men (Humbert in *Lolita*, Van Veen in *Ada*), we suppose the worst. In fact, Flora is just being dramatic; Wild's sense of rivalry is purely professional. While his wife entertains her boyfriends, he frets about his fellow neurologists, reminding us of Van, another psychic investigator, in a different way. The Wilds, newly minted graduate and brilliant, rich researcher, met at a Northeastern college (yet another familiar milieu) and now pretty much go their separate ways. Which means, in the husband's case—obesity underscoring immobility—not going much of anywhere at all. Wild is a sort of Buddha figure—one of the cards contains Nabokov's notes on Nirvana—meditating his way toward blissful self-negation.

As for the author of *Laura*, whose name may be Ivan Vaughan (connecting him not only to Van, full name Ivan, but also, through its talismanic v's, to some of Vladimir Vladimirovich's other authorial surrogates), both he and his book remain shadowy—perhaps by design, perhaps due only to the novel's incompletion. Already the first chapter gives us the primal scene of *Laura*'s conception. The author and Flora are sleeping together for the first time: "Her exquisite bone structure immediately slipped into a novel—became in fact the secret structure of that novel." Time stops—Flora, who lives for the moment, complains that he takes off his watch to make love—and the sonneteer's gesture, which is also Humbert's final note ("And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita"), quickly follows:

> Readers are directed to that book—on a very high shelf, in a very bad light—but already existing, as magic exists, and death, and as shall exist, from now on, the mouth she made automatically while using that towel to wipe her thighs after the promised withdrawal.

Flora, the condom monitor, forestalls reproduction—we remember that Van is sterile, Lolita's child is stillborn, and John Shade's commits suicide—but creation happens nonetheless, the flesh made word. Flora becomes "identif[ied]" "with an unwritten, half-written, rewritten difficult book"—a startling phrase, given the condition of our manuscript, and surely grist for Dmitri's interpretive mill, but only until we remember that all books may be so described. Unwritten, half-written, rewritten: these are the stages of literary gestation, the child growing in the womb.

"Identified" is also worth pondering. *Laura*'s author (it seems), describing his work, says this: "The 'I' of the book is a neurotic and hesitant man of letters, who destroys his mistress in the act of portraying her." Here we start to glimpse a meaning behind the novel's most obvious interpretive conundrum: what do Wild's story and Flora/*Laura*'s have to do with each other? Mental self-effacement on the one hand, literary creation on the other. The answer, it seems, is that the first is offered as an allegory of the second. Vadim Vadimovich, Nabokov's avatar in *Look at the Harlequins!*, defines the act of fiction-writing as "the endless re-creation of my fluid self." But re-creation, we are now to understand, erases what it copies. Flora's father, a photographer, takes pictures of his own suicide (shooting himself in two senses), the allegory done another way. For Wild, however, and clearly for his author, creative self-destruction takes place in an ecstasy of trance-like concentration. Nabokov's initial title (supplied here by Dmitri as a

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parenthetical subtitle or alternative title, though with no warrant in the cards) put the idea more succinctly: *Dying Is Fun*.

Originals, known only by their copies: this is one of Nabokov's great themes. Because finally all we have are copies—art, memories, ghosts, the echoes of childhood that sound in all our actions. *Ada* takes place on Antiterra, a garbled version of Earth haunted by a dim awareness of its archetype. Kinbote's kingdom of Zembla conceals the man, Botkin, he probably really is, and the place, Russia, he really lost. The life of Sebastian Knight—the "real" life—lies somewhere behind his brother's efforts to re-imagine it. And so forth. But *The Original of Laura* puts an extra spin on the conceit. Flora, after all, *is* the original, and *Laura* the copy. But since we only know the latter through the former—since *Laura*, the copy, is itself, in that sense, effaced—their positions seem reversed. We are missing the copy, but it *feels* like we are missing the original. So Flora becomes a copy of her own copy. And for *Laura*'s postulated readers within the world of Nabokov's novel, the ones who make it a bestseller, the ones for whom "the original of Laura" would constitute a tantalizing revelation, the copy is indeed the original, since *Laura*, not Flora, is what they know—just as biographers and other literary gossips are forever trying to read an author's life in terms of his fictional alter egos (so that Joyce becomes Stephen, Roth Portnoy, and so on).

Nor does the fun end there. There is a suggestion, via another glimpse of Flora "toweling her inguen" (Nabokovian fancy-talk for "groin"), that *Laura* itself tells a story of literary procreation—Laura, after all, was Petrarch's muse, substance of myriad sonnets—and that the passage that reads "Readers are directed to that book . . ." is in fact part of the elusive novel itself, referring to yet another book, one further ontological level down. Frames within frames—what the narrator calls (though it's not at all clear, by now, which narrator we are talking about) "receding ovals." There are other games and enigmas. Wild himself reads *Laura*, blurbed on his copy as "a roman à clef with the clef lost for ever"—while elsewhere we read of Flora's own recollections: "fragments of her past, with details lost or put back in the wrong order, TAIL betwe[e]n DELTA and SLIT," which sounds more like a roman à cleft. Flora hesitates, herself, to read the book, though a friend assures her that it contains an account of "your wonderful death . . . you'll scream with laughter." Dying, as we know, is fun.

Wild is presented sometimes in the first person, sometimes in the third, and sometimes, perhaps, through a pseudonym. On some of the cards, his book, the record of his experiments, seems to be written or at least narrated by a figure who calls himself Nigel Delling (which Dmitri transcribes, for some reason, as Dalling, though the reminiscence of "deletion" is apt enough), elsewhere varied, perhaps, to A. N. D. or just plain AND—the monogram, possibly, of postmortem continuation. A figure named Eric makes a flash appearance on one of the slips, scrawling the by-now-familiar signature of coitus interruptus on Flora's milky thigh. Is he a version of Vaughan, or another character altogether? At this point we must throw up the cards. Whether these disparate and seemingly incompatible elements are pieces of one coherent but devilishly complex design, or whether they are only the detritus of countervailing drafts, we cannot say.

The Original of Laura does have its pleasures, though so short are most of its fragments that these, too, are usually interrupted. But it is clearly a premature effort. Vadim Vadimovich, who has much to say about the process of revision, speaks of the margins of drafts as the place "where inspiration finds its sweetest clover," and the prose here reflects a paucity of rumination. Much of the writing is pedestrian by Nabokov's standards, the wordplay forced and facile ("a hollowed abdomen, so flat as to belie the notion of a 'belly,'" "games of blindman's buff would be played in the buff"). Most tellingly, the novel lacks a unifying tone, a verbal point of view, the kind of characteristic sound that makes each of Nabokov's other works unique, be it a masterpiece such as *Lolita* ("light of my life, fire of my loins") or a relatively minor effort such as *Transparent Things* ("Easy, you know, does it, son"). The novel we have has yet to find its voice.

As for the cards themselves, the fact that we are now able to glimpse for the first time Nabokov's work in progress, they tell us relatively little that we might want to know. Since almost all the deletions are so heavy as to make the blotted words unreadable, and since we have, with nearly no exceptions, only one version of any given passage, we cannot see a process unfold. A second thought does not tell us much without the first. The numerology of the various fragments—bundles numbered with letters or Roman numerals or tally strokes, cards labeled DO or Z2, the only Nabokov code this manuscript will ever yield—is amusing and curious but nothing more. Nabokov glutted us on his genius. We shouldn't nose around his table scraps for fodder that they cannot provide. ◆

Michael Scammell
SAINT AND SINNER

BITTER SPRING:
A LIFE OF IGNAZIO SILONE
By Stanislao Pugliese
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In June 1950, Ignazio Silone and Arthur Koestler, two of the most prominent anti-communist writers of that era, attended a convivial dinner party in West Berlin. They had gathered with several other intellectuals to celebrate the founding conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an American-sponsored riposte to the Soviet Cominform's "peace conferences" of the preceding year. Those were the early days of the Cold War, and more than a hundred Western writers, critics, and cultural figures had converged on the blockaded city of Berlin to demonstrate solidarity with its people and to resist the Soviet cultural and political offensive. According to Koestler's wife, Mamaine, Koestler got drunk and repeatedly accused Silone of ignoring Koestler's fraternal feelings for him. Silone was behaving, said Koestler, "as if he were a broad-bottomed Abruzzi peasant" and Koestler "a cosmopolitan gigolo."

Silone made some mollifying remarks and claimed to be mystified by the outburst, but he was probably bluffing. Taciturn and even morose by inclination, and an uncharismatic speaker, he had the satisfaction of having just bested the loquacious Koestler in their public discussion about policy, while Koestler's volubility reflected his own frustration at having lost the argument. The dispute had been about how best to respond to Soviet propaganda. Koestler advocated fighting fire

Michael Scammell's new book, Koestler: The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic, has just been published by Random House.

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with fire and carrying the propaganda war to the enemy by means of radio stations beamed at the satellite countries and the publication of books, magazines, and newspapers aimed at the Soviet bloc. Silone urged a less confrontational policy of promoting social and political reforms at home and merely showcasing Western cultural achievements abroad, so as to teach by example.

Their differences reflected a gathering split in the anti-communist left in Europe (and to a lesser extent in America) that would persist for the next twenty-five years. The question was how to straddle the divisions between left and right in the West in opposing Soviet expansionism and the political pressure from the East. Koestler maintained that progressives should hold their noses (if need be) and join an alliance between left and right to fight the greater evil of Stalinism. Silone, out of an instinctive anti-Americanism and lingering nostalgia for his communist past, disagreed. In his native region of Italy, he argued, "half the Abruzzi peasants" were communists and the other half were not, but since both were "fighting against Prince Torlonia," you could not ask the non-communists to oppose the communists. (Prince Torlonia was the largest landowner and political leader of the region where Silone spent his childhood.) Stalinism and the threat that it posed was trumped, for Silone, by the more ancient struggle between the left and the right in Europe, and the left could never accept an alliance with reactionary forces.

"Silone always comes back sooner or later to the Abruzzi peasants and Prince Torlonia," commented Mamaine when reporting these conversations, and she was right. Silone's deep attachment to his roots was well known. As Stanislao G. Pugliese, Silone's first biographer in English, writes in his new book, an understanding of those roots is crucial to understanding Silone's works. Pugliese cites Silone's autobiographical essay, "Emergency Exit," written shortly before the Berlin conference, in support of this claim: "Everything I have written up to now," Silone asserted, "and probably everything I will write in the future, even though I have traveled and lived abroad for many years, refers only to that part of the country which can be seen from the house where I was born—no more than twenty or thirty miles in any direction."

Silone was born in 1900 in a part of southeastern Italy known as the Abruzzo, a land of howling wolves and rugged mountains, in Pugliese's words, and of "saints and stonecutters," in Silone's. In the years of Silone's youth it was still a remote and benighted region, dominated by a small and powerful aristocracy (led by Prince Torlonia) and populated for the most part by *cafoni*, downtrodden peasants barely able to read or write or eke out a living from the unforgiving soil. Silone, born Secondo Tranquilli, was the son of a small landowner, and so not quite a peasant himself, but he identified with the *cafoni* out of sympathy for their poverty, and as the result of a difficult and haunted childhood. By the age of eleven he had seen four brothers and sisters die of illness (an older sister had perished before he was born), and in his twelfth year he saw his struggling father die, too. His impoverished mother, left with two sons to care for, tried to make a living as a weaver, but she herself perished, in 1915, in a terrible earthquake that leveled the family's hometown of Pescina and devastated the entire region, killing over thirty thousand people and leaving Secondo, who was fourteen, and his younger brother Romolo, who was eleven, to be raised by their maternal grandmother.

Pugliese describes the earthquake as having inflicted a trauma on Silone comparable to the shock inflicted on Dostoyevsky by his pretended execution. The young boy never forgot the sight of his dead mother being pulled from the ruins of their toppled house, and he associated it in his mind with the sufferings of the poor peasants around him. Observing the vast divide between the luxurious lives of the aristocracy and the bitter struggle for survival of the *cafoni* in and around Pescina, and influenced by "burning rage against all forms of injustice inherited from his father," he developed socialist leanings early. Later, after arriving at a school in Rome to continue his education, and confronted by the greed and corruption fostered by the distribution of earthquake relief, he joined the Young Socialists, rising quickly to become their leader. In 1921, he became a founding member of the clandestine Italian Communist Party.

A year later the still-young Tranquilli entered into what was to become the defining struggle of his life, against the Italian fascist regime led by Benito Mussolini, which affected his future in two important ways. First, he was obliged to spend a great deal of time traveling abroad in Spain, Germany, France, and the Soviet Union on party work, an uncomfortable arrangement for a patriot as attached to the soil as he was. Second, he had to master the art of secrecy, taking on a baffling and ever-changing array of party aliases—over a dozen, according to Pugliese—including the one that later stuck, Ignazio Silone, which he adopted in 1923 while languishing in a Spanish jail.

Secrecy became a passion for Silone, along with its necessary corollary, the ability to keep silent. This was evident in a turning point in his career during a visit to Moscow in 1927. Both he and Palmiro Togliatti, who were together leading an Italian delegation to a meeting of the Communist International, refused to sign a resolution expelling Leon Trotsky from the party without being allowed to read the document that supposedly incriminated him. Trotsky was expelled anyway by a resolution that was claimed to be "unanimous." Togliatti made his peace with the Soviet leaders, and later became the head of the Italian Communist Party, but Silone kept silent, while gradually becoming alienated from his comrades. At the end of the 1920s, having contracted tuberculosis and fallen into a severe depression, he hid his increasing alienation from the Communist Party by moving to a clinic in Davos, Switzerland; but in the summer of 1931 he was expelled from the party anyway for his failure to support the party line.

It was during his illness and convalescence in Switzerland that, without any formal experience in fiction, Silone wrote his first and most famous novel, *Fontamara*, a work of polemical social realism that bore witness to his homesickness for his beloved Abruzzo and the peasant community that he had left behind. Its hero, he later said, was not so much an individual as "the rural proletariat, the eternally suffering peasants," although the novel tells their story through the rebellion of a single peasant, Barbera Viola, against the new fascist regime and his transformation into a fledgling revolutionary. Viola is ultimately arrested, tortured, and brought to his death in a fascist jail—an emblem of the fate of the *cafoni* under fascism.

Fontamara appeared first in German in 1933, and was quickly translated into twenty-seven languages, turning its author into an international celebrity. But the novel could not be published in Silone's native Italy, because of his communist and anti-fascist reputation. He soon followed it with another novel set in the Abruzzo, *Bread and Wine*. It told the story of Pietro Spina, a communist who returns to his native region to judge the prospects for revolution. Spina is a much more self-conscious and intellectual hero than Viola. The hero of *Fontamara* had

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still embodied the revolutionary zeal of Silone's youth, but the hero of *Bread and Wine* ends up disillusioned and disgusted with the party that inspired him.

Pugliese notes that *Bread and Wine* is considered by many to be Silone's finest novel. It is more discursive than *Fontamara*, but also a more mature work of ideas—a reflection in fiction on the dilemma of ends and means that tortured so many intellectuals in the twentieth century. A third novel, *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, completed in 1940, constitutes the last in what Silone considered a trilogy. It continues the tale of Spina, who goes willingly to his death at the hands of the fascists for the sake of personal loyalty to his former comrades.

Pugliese is not terribly interested in Silone's fiction. He pays only cursory attention to the novels, dwelling more on their subject matter than on their literary qualities. What really interests him is Silone's politics. Among Silone's writings, he seems to prefer *The School for Dictators*, a non-fictional satirical monograph couched in dialogue, and written shortly before *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, to the novel that followed it. He observes that for Silone the distinguishing quality of fascism was not that it pitted one class against another (which it undoubtedly did), nor that it perpetuated inequality (ditto), but that it mobilized and marshaled "all the relics of primitive barbarism that still survive in modern man," transferring to the political arena "many pre-logical and a-logical relics of a primitive mentality" lurking beneath the "varnish" of civilization. The fascists had also been successful, according to Silone, in "contaminating many of [their] political opponents" by forcing them to struggle against fascism with fascist methods, thereby becoming "barbarians themselves. Red barbarians."

There can be little doubt that Silone had put his finger on one of the prime reasons why fascism flourished in so much of "civilized" Europe—it expressed an almost irresistible atavism, which was why it remained the chief ideological and political enemy for Silone even after his break with communism (for Koestler it was the other way around). Silone evidently feared fascism's pull precisely because of its great appeal to "the masses," who were dangerously vulnerable to unreason and brutality. But while the argument that fascism had "contaminated" its opponents may have some truth to it, the implication that fascism somehow pre-dated—and was more innocent than—communism is false. Both, in their modern form, arose from the ashes of World War I at approximately the same time. But Silone was not yet prepared to equate the two, and he could never quite bring himself to do so. One of the charges he was to level against Koestler and like-minded anti-communists was that they were too inclined to use the same methods as their opponents to achieve their goals. The equivalent charge against Silone (and many other ex-communist intellectuals) has to be that they hid behind their hatred for fascism and soft-pedaled their criticisms of communism.

Silone's was a particularly complex and ambiguous and tortured case. During World War II, for example, after he had rejoined the Italian Socialist Party and become chief of its foreign office in exile, he was contacted by Allen Dulles of the American Office of Strategic Services (the OSS was the predecessor of the CIA), and became a conduit for passing money and information between the Americans and members of the Italian resistance, and for keeping an eye on the communists in the resistance. This prompted the adoption of more aliases, and Silone was so successful at concealing his true position that he wound up in a Swiss jail on suspicion that he was still a communist. As it happens, his relationship with the OSS caused him to soften his earlier hostility to capitalist America, but he maintained his left-wing principles and continued to insist to the Americans that after the war, even though Italy would be occupied as an enemy power, its people should be allowed to hold free elections and decide on their own form of government, which he was convinced would be a socialist one.

By war's end, Silone was also, at last, prepared to make his twenty-year-old break with the Communist Party explicit and public. He did so in "Emergency Exit," his contribution to *The God That Failed*, a remarkable volume of testimony by ex-communists conceived and edited by Arthur Koestler and Richard Crossman. The essay included a lot about Prince Torlonia and the Abruzzo *cafoni*, but what got Silone into trouble was his revelation about visiting Moscow in 1927 and refusing to sign the resolution condemning Trotsky. This was his first public mention of it, and Trotsky's widow published a scathing letter accusing him of moral cowardice for waiting twenty-two years to reveal the truth about the infamous and supposedly "unanimous" resolution. Meanwhile Silone was back in postwar Italy and served as a Socialist deputy from 1946 to 1948, when he played a leading role in preventing an alliance between the Socialist and Communist parties. He also published two more novels, *A Handful of Blackberries* and *The Secret of Luca*, in which his estrangement from communism became a major theme.

Pugliese notes that the story of Silone's zigzag path into socialism, and then from socialism into communism and back to socialism again, is complicated by his many omissions and silences, and his self-evident penchant for myth-making; unfortunately these attributes seem to have contributed to the chaos in Pugliese's baffling book. Pugliese is determined not to write a conventional, chronological biography, and not to seem "omniscient" or overbearing, but he ties himself in such knots to avoid the pitfalls he fears that he falls into the opposite trap of repeatedly losing his way in his own narrative, which in many respects is rambling and unfocused to the point of incoherence. He aims to treat Silone's life thematically, slicing it up into chapters on Silone and the Communist Party, Silone's writing and exile, Silone and post-fascism, Silone and cold war culture, and so on, but although he has interesting things to say about all these topics, his disregard for chronology or coherence leads him to repeat facts, dates, and anecdotes over and over again to fit each new context, leading the reader's eyes to glaze over and his mind to wander. This is something of an achievement in a biography of a figure as riveting as Silone.

Silone still awaits a proper biography in English, but for those who already know something of his life and work, Pugliese is worth wading into. His analysis of Silone's ideas on fascism, and his account of the geopolitical intricacies of the postwar settlement in Europe—along with Silone's complicated maneuvers between the parties, and his ambivalent attempts to become a politician—is very skillfully done. Pugliese shows why Silone, despite his refusal to allow the Italian

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Socialist Party to collaborate with the communists, found it so hard to engage in the kind of ideological warfare that Koestler advocated. In his essay for *The God That Failed*, Silone emphasized that his expulsion from the party had been "a very sad day for me, a day of mourning, of mourning for my youth." He never forgot the communist idealism of his early days and his affection for his comrades, even when he was forced to acknowledge the infernal corruption of the party machine. After the war, Silone seemed unable to commit himself completely to any political program and increasingly held himself aloof from political life. Interestingly, he also disdained the easy anti-fascism that was popular in Italy at the time. To be "anti" only sustained the illusion that the fascists were still powerful enough to be worth opposing.

Silone turned instead to Europe, having concluded as early as 1946 that remaking Europe was even more important than remaking its individual countries. "The unification of Europe is the fundamental political task of our generation," he declared. "If we do not solve this problem our generation can consider itself an historic failure." The following year, as president of the PEN Center in Italy, he spoke at an international PEN conference in Basel on "The Dignity of Intelligence and the Unworthiness of Intellectuals," pointing to the unique responsibility that intellectuals bore toward society, and to the inability of most of them, including himself, to rise to the challenge. In 1949, at another PEN conference, he admonished writers and intellectuals not to submit to the power of the state, or to become "vassals" of those in power anywhere. And demonstrating again his perpetual drive for evenhandedness, he charged them to resist "the corruption of the mass media" in the West.

It was natural in these circumstances for Silone to reach out to European writers like himself. He was part of the generation of the 1930s that took it for granted that writers should also be men of action, and as in the cases of many of his fellow writers, it cost him many years in exile. He and Koestler had first met in fact in communist literary circles in Switzerland before the war, and then again in Rome in 1948, soon after the success of Koestler's masterpiece *Darkness at Noon*. Koestler, who agreed with Silone about Europe and the political direction it should take, had come fresh from meetings in Paris with Sartre, Camus, and Malraux, and their discussions of what to do about Europe. Silone knew the French writers through his own frequent visits to Paris and contributions to Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* and other French journals. All of them—Silone, Koestler, Camus, Sartre, Malraux—had been with the Communist Party at one time or another, and all of them were preoccupied with the prospects for socialism and supported the concept of a united continent. Indeed, for a brief time in the late 1940s, it looked as if they might all line up behind a common concept of Europe as free, united, anti-communist, and social democratic.

The concept was shared by the American liberals who had successfully established the Marshall Plan for Western Europe and helped to organize the Congress for Cultural Freedom conference in 1950, but the moment for unity—or, at least, a unity that included America—soon passed. None of the three French writers attended the Berlin conference, though Camus and Malraux sent messages of support. Malraux, like Koestler, was ready to accept America's leading role in Europe, and to make a pact of convenience with the political right (he eventually joined de Gaulle's government as minister of information), convinced that it was the only realistic way to oppose communism. Sartre, steadfastly anti-capitalist and anti-American, briefly tried to find a "third way" between the two blocs, but moved leftward to become an apologist for Stalinism. Camus, who was closest to both Silone and Koestler, bitterly opposed Sartre's defense of the Soviet Union and clung to a sort of third way of his own; and though Silone parted company from Camus over decolonization and the war in Algeria, he fully supported him in his disputation with Sartre.

In Berlin, Silone had the satisfaction of prevailing in his argument with Koestler that the West should devote itself to cultural and political self-improvement and make the competition with the Soviet bloc peaceful rather than confrontational, and his influence on the organizers of the conference within the CIA turned out to be crucial. One outcome of his preferred policy was the Congress for Cultural Freedom's eventual decision to found a stable of literary magazines in Europe and Asia to showcase the cultural richness of the free countries. It was only natural that Silone should become co-editor of a new Italian journal, *Tempo Presente*, similar to sister journals such as *Encounter* in Britain, *Preuves* in France, and *Der Monat* in West Germany. Silone proved to be an excellent editor: cosmopolitan, sophisticated about literature, and politically astute—though not astute enough (as the more cynical Koestler was) to spot the hidden hand of the CIA behind the CCF.

In 1967, when word of the CIA's role in supporting the Congress for Cultural Freedom leaked out, it provoked a huge scandal among intellectuals in Europe and the United States, and Silone was thrown on the defensive. His ideological enemies pointed to his wartime work with the OSS as evidence that he must have been an American spy all along, and that in editing *Tempo Presente* he had simply carried out the orders of the CIA—a ridiculous accusation in light of the magazine's record of intellectual independence and its frequent criticism of Western institutions.

Scale

For Heather McHugh

In the stratification of domestic perception,
the man walks through the living room and notes
the mantel's pricey bric-a-brac; the child stares up
at a light bulb, brighter than the sun beneath
the floor lamp's shade. For the dog, it's knees
and tabletops. For the cat, it's the darting escapes
of the small. Mouse, cockroach and louse—worlds
scaled to discriminating ambitions and dimensions.
How easily overthrown when the man, in his hurry,
stops and turns, puts a hand to his heart, and then
drops past mantel, lamp and table top—thump!
Now his eyes focus on the coffee table's claw foot,
next on a single burnished claw stretched toward
a scrap of walnut hung up on filaments of carpet,
a tidbit dropped by a grandson. After that, he spots
specks of lint, dust motes that grow with his attention
so huge they change into solar systems with planets
where he might see cities, rooftops and, who knows,
even a man mowing a his lawn, if he had the time.
But now his eyes fix on a vortex of pink spirals, ridges
and rills whirling inward to the labyrinth's still center
where at last his focus stops. Why, look, it's his own
dear fingerprint. First there forever, and then not.

STEPHEN DOBYNS

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(A part of the genius of the CIA's early leaders was to give the writers and intellectuals it supported a free hand.)

In the inflamed context of postwar Italy, however, where a portion of the intelligentsia was still on the defensive about its collaboration with Mussolini and another portion consisted of communists and fellow travelers (and the two camps, for obvious reasons, overlapped), the appearance of such an easy target was hard to resist. Silone was not helped at this juncture by his reputation for stubbornness and his penchant for secrecy. The Polish writer Gustav Herling, a frequent contributor to *Tempo Presente* and a close friend of Silone's, once described him as "truly a man who did not speak much and who knew how to keep a secret," and even Silone's second wife and literary collaborator Darina Silone described his character as "difficult" and his personality as "very complex." No one, she added, "ever knew him completely," voicing an insight that was to attain new relevance after Silone's death.

Silone, meanwhile, retreated into his private world. Keeping his own counsel and hewing to his own path, he held aloof from politics and remained independent of official circles, turning down offers to become Italy's ambassador to France or to head Italy's newly established state TV network. Literature was still his main métier, and apart from some journalism he published a novel, *The Fox and the Camelias*, set in Switzerland between the wars (his only novel not set in the Abruzzo); a play, *The Story of a Humble Christian*, based in part on the life of Father Charles de Foucauld, a French holy man; and a collection of autobiographical essays, *Emergency Exit,* named for the essay that had originally appeared in *The God That Failed*. Both the play and the essays were critical and commercial successes, and in his last years Silone was showered with honors. When he died in 1978, the president of Italy lauded the writer—in terms that many of his compatriots now shared—as the "noble, rigorous, inflexible, democratic conscience of contemporary Italian culture."

Silone's posthumous reputation seemed entirely safe, but the taciturn, introverted survivor of the Abruzzo earthquake had one last secret up his sleeve. It was revealed in 1996, when an Italian historian caused a sensation when he accused Silone of having spied for the fascist police between the wars. The evidence was to be found in a series of letters signed by a certain "Silvestri" to Guido Bellone, a high-ranking fascist police official in Rome, which the historian had unearthed in the government archives. Pugliese devotes his best and most gripping chapter to a detailed account of the controversy that divided Italian public opinion over whether the letters were genuine or not. Silone's supporters maintained that they were forgeries, whereas his opponents held that the handwriting was undoubtedly Silone's. Moreover, the key document in the collection, an emotional appeal to Bellone to release the writer from their arrangement, dating from 1930, appeared to suggest a collaboration that had lasted over ten years.

Somewhat hyperbolically, Pugliese compares the fallout from these heated allegations to the impact of the Dreyfus affair in France. Members of the pro-Silone camp pointed to numerous inconsistencies and weaknesses in the evidence: there were surprisingly few letters to account for a whole decade; no other high-ranking fascist seems to have known about the letters, and no fascists had ever used the information that Silone was a spy, even when they could have destroyed him with it; and there was no conclusive evidence—other than the handwriting—that "Silvestri" was Silone. A senior Communist Party official took another tack, alleging that Silone had actually been a triple agent, having pretended to spy on party members so he could winkle information from the fascist police that would be useful to his communist comrades. This would account for the fact that another bitter enemy of Silone's, Palmiro Togliatti, did not denounce him when, as minister of justice after the war, he had access to these files.

The balance of informed opinion swung against Silone. Further documents were unearthed to show that Silone had a good reason for approaching the police two years before writing his incriminating letter: in 1928, his beloved younger brother Romolo had been arrested and tortured in jail (where he died two years later) on suspicion of being a member of the Communist Party (which he wasn't). Commentators speculated that Silone, who *was* an active member of the party, must have been racked with guilt over this injustice, and was probably prepared to do anything to get his brother out. This still left open the question of whether he had been in contact with Bellone much earlier, and whether, as further documents suggested, he had acted as an informer when in Switzerland between the wars. There was even speculation that Silone had secretly "confessed" his crimes in one or other of his novels or in his first play, aptly entitled *And He Hid Himself*. But none of these details seemed important beside the enormity of the fact of his collaboration.

Pugliese catalogs the many books, articles, and debates that have poured forth since these revelations in painstaking and fascinating detail, and he is forced to conclude (as Silone's widow, Darina, also concluded) that at least some of the documents are provably in Silone's handwriting and therefore genuine. But what does the collaboration mean for our understanding of Silone's life and work? Some on the left in Italy and elsewhere have rushed to denounce the author as yet another deceitful apostate "like Orwell" (for his list of communist sympathizers delivered to the British Foreign Office during World War II), and therefore not worth reading or respecting, while more cautious critics see the denigration of Silone from the opposite point of view as just the latest in a series of recent attacks from the left on Orwell, Koestler, Camus, and other writers who turned against the Communist Party.

Pugliese ultimately comes down on the side of those who believe that Silone's work speaks for itself, and endorses Alexander Stille's conclusion that the recent scandals "don't diminish the power of Silone's writings." D. H. Lawrence once wrote that readers should "judge the tale, not the teller," having in mind the difference between the complex artistic message embodied in a novel or poem and what was said outside the work by or about the author, but Lawrence's dictum fits Silone's case as well. To anyone who reads his novels and his journalism, it is perfectly obvious where he stood with regard to both fascism and communism, whatever compromises he may have felt obliged to make in his everyday life. As Pugliese shows (and as Silone himself asserted), he was fundamentally religious in his worldview—an "apprentice saint," in the words of R. W. B. Lewis—who tried in vain to reconcile the secular promise of socialism with the transcendent vision of Christianity. He fell victim to the tragedy of his age. Caught between the hammer of totalitarianism and the anvil of twentieth-century reality, Silone, like so many of his peers, "sought in politics that which politics could not grant him." Like other mortals, he made mistakes, lost his way, and sinned; but it is in, and for, his work that Silone will be rightly remembered, and that is why we still need to read him. ◆

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Washington Diarist

The New Proles

When I was young, I enjoyed the romance of the garret. Poverty, or relative poverty, became me. I mastered arcane books and composed ambitious essays in the smallest apartment anybody ever saw in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When you opened the door, it hit the bed, which of course led to some misunderstandings. I rested my typewriter on a scarred wooden board that groaned every time I struck the keys. When what I wrote was published, I took my earnings to an elegant clothing store on Newbury Street, in defiance of the disconnection notice in my briefcase. (Balzac says somewhere that a student is a person who can afford only luxuries.) I was often broke but never destitute. Many years later Irving Howe used a phrase that described my state of happy indigence: "a decent poverty," he called it. Lately, however, I have been observing a high incidence of indecent poverty. Many young writers and journalists I meet are close to penniless. They have almost not a hope of supporting themselves in the pursuit of their calling. A garret is no longer affordable. Jobs are disappearing. Internships are unpaid or barely paid, which has the consequence of corrupting a meritocratic system with the inequities of social class, as the fortunately born become the fortunately hired. And when they publish what they write—well, now we leave the honorable tradition of the struggling young writer for the unprecedented enchantments of the digital revolution.

Owing to its vastness and its velocity, no medium of communication and publication ever depended more desperately on "content"—the lifeless business expression for words and ideas—than the Internet. Some people celebrate this as a historic breakthrough for literariness in its various forms. They rhapsodize about the democratization of the writing life, about the demise of the "gatekeepers" and their institutions, about the pure and perfect autonomy of blogging and "self-publishing." Who needs *The New York Times* if I can arrange for you to know what it is in my heart at this instant? Leave aside the question of the relation of blogging to writing, of posting to publishing. I wish to emphasize what the love songs omit: the economic and professional consequences of the cheap entropy of the web—its proletarianization of the writer. I wonder if people outside the besieged walls of the profession understand how little is earned with contributions to websites. The sums are scandalous. And sometimes there are no sums at all. Sometimes contributions to websites are produced for free. Writers are the only people I know who are expected to work for next to nothing or nothing. Without them, as I say, the intelligent regions of the Internet would not exist; but even as their skills are increasingly in demand, they are treated increasingly as worthless. You do not have to read the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* to recognize that this becomes an issue of dignity.

From the standpoint of the owners of these institutions, this "business model" may seem rational—if they can save money on paper, printing, and postage, why not also save money on prose?—but theirs is not the only standpoint that matters in considering the future of our culture. (Leave aside also the question of paper, and of its almost spiritual necessity for serious writing and its betterment of life.) It is not the owners who make our culture, though some of them serve it admirably. Indeed, an enlightened owner is a hero of culture. And yet it is of no importance that the market will bear this immiseration of writers; the history of the market is riddled with injustices of all kinds. And what model of economic rationality is it that recommends the exertion of one's skills for little or no reward? I refer you to a report by James Rainey in the *Los Angeles Times* a few weeks ago about the reality of the contemporary freelancer: "what's sailing away, a decade into the 21st century, is the common perception that writing is a profession—or at least a skilled craft that should come not only with psychic rewards but with something resembling a living wage." Is this really what we want? (About Rainey's article, one of the brats on *Gawker*—see what insomnia can do to a man?—poignantly observed that "it's a little disturbing that the job that pays my bills now may be helping to destroy the one that helped pay them when I was in college.") And a similar indecency is taking place in book publishing. Laud the Kindle all you want, but who will pay the advance for the novels and the histories that you will cop for $8.99, without which they cannot be written? Not Amazon. A literary agent in New York was recently heard to remark that $30,000 is the new $100,000, and it takes years to write a book. Forward-looking thinkers explain that the money that the publishing houses, or their corporate proprietors, save by printing fewer physical copies will make up the difference; but anybody who believes that those savings will be restored to the primary mission of the editors and the publishers does not understand a thing about the corporate temperament, especially in the aftermath of a panic. No, nausea is in order.

In an interminable piece in *The Atlantic*, Michael Kinsley complains that newspaper articles are too long. "On the Internet, news articles get to the point," my friend declares, whereas "newspaper writing … is encrusted with conventions that don't add to your understanding of the news." He follows this with a quantitative and semantic analysis of various examples of "unnecessary verbiage"; and like much quantitative and semantic analysis, the results are clever and trivial. I do not doubt that newspapers are not as linguistically efficient as they can be, except perhaps *USA Today*, that ur-website. But Kinsley's worry about the financial costs of prolixity is silly: no newsroom budget will be rescued by cutting "tag" and "context." So may I say a word on behalf of necessary verbiage? Brevity may be the soul of wit, or lingerie, or texting, or quail eggs, but all subjects are not the same. Efficiency of expression is in some realms a virtue and in some realms a vice. Brevity is certainly not the soul of news, if by news you mean more than information. "The point" is not always easy. There is not always a "takeaway." Anyway, this is already an abbreviating age. The forces of concision and distillation are winning. After the death of waiting, I do not see the wisdom of preaching impatience. A culture cannot thrive upon a fear of discourse.

Leon Wieseltier

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